INDIAN DRAMA





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INTRODUCTION*

Suniti Kumar Chatterji

Drama, as a developed or finished literary *genre* or type, presupposes a long period of development not only in the literary expression of a people but also in its fine arts, including architecture, sculpture and painting, and music and dancing. In India, from the earliest times in her history, at least more than 2,000 years ago, the art of the drama seems to have been well established. Its beginnings are not very clear as they are lost in the mists of antiquity, but starting from a few centuries before Christ right down to the end of the classical period of Indian history, that is, up to the advent of the conquering Turks and the establishment of a Muslim State in North India, drama has been one of the finest expressions of Indian culture. Scholars have tried to trace its development in Sanskrit back to the Vedas. That is only natural, since the Vedas, in the absence of other literary documents, form the *fons et origo* of Indian literature. In the *Rig-Veda*, for instance, we find a very remarkable series of dialogue hymns in which two or more characters address each other in verses which are looked upon in orthodox Vedic tradition as having been composed by the characters or personages themselves, who are ordinarily superhuman or divine. Thus the famous Pururavas and Urvasi hymn (*Rig-Veda*, X 95) embodies one of the most romantic stories in literature—that of the love of a mortal hero for a heavenly nymph, and the story unfolds in the course of a conversation between the hero and the heroine, which takes place at a crucial point in the story itself when the hero meets his long-lost love, only to lose her again, perhaps for ever. But this tragic ending was later modified by a promise on the part of the divine heroine to meet her human lover again, and an actual fulfilment of that promise. Here we

*In transliterating the names of authors, plays, etc., it has not been possible either to be uniform or to give diacritical marks, as the book is intended to be popular and the pronunciation of the same word often varies from one language to another.

have capital material for a drama, which is certainly not religious but fundamentally romantic.

The Vedic Aryans therefore had a kind of crude drama which utilised traditional story-material. The story which was well known to the people, was thus unfolded by means of dialogue. In later times, as the mixed Hindu people was formed through the fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan elements in the Indian population, everything came to fit in with a scheme of mythology and a background of religion and philosophy. The other forms of art which were developing at the time began to reinforce the tradition of this primitive dialogue-drama. An art of puppet plays appears also to have developed in India at least a couple of centuries before Christ, and possibly earlier, and the dialogues which were intoned by the performers manipulating the puppets with their strings (*sutradhara*) certainly gave a decided impetus to the emergence of the drama, truly speaking, in ancient India. Dating from the third century B.C., at Sitabenga and Jogimara caves in Ramgarh Hill in South Bihar (Magadha of ancient times), there are inscriptions which are highly suggestive of the existence of a developed dramatic art. In Sitabenga cave we have a sort of crude stage excavated in the rock, and a fragment of a Prakrit verse in Brahmi characters of the 3rd century B.C. found here is one of the earliest specimens of Indian secular literature in authentic contemporary writing, as it forms part of a love song, describing how poets lightened the love-lorn heart and consoled it for the absence of the beloved. The inscription of Jogimara has been variously explained, but we clearly find in it an avowal of love by a young man called Deva-dinna or Deva-datta ('God-given'), who was a *Rupa-daksha* by profession. for a girl, Sutanuka ('the beautifully slim one'), who was a *Deva-dasi.* The word *Rupa-daksha* has been variously explained, and the common scholarly interpretation, based of course on early literature, is 'one who is skilled in financial matters, accounts, etc.' But the interpretation which at first sight one would be tempted to give it would be 'an artist, one who is skilled in the plastic arts (Rupa)'. *Deva-dasi* would be 'a temple-dancer', a young girl dedicated to the gods, and dancing, music, and drama would be her proper vocation. From the inscription at Jogimara

cave, therefore, we can naturally assume a very modern situation for 3rd century B.C. in India—the love of an artist for an actress.

This might appear a little speculative, but judging from the full development of the dramatic art in early post-Christian centuries, its beginnings and early history can certainly be carried back to the middle of the first millennium B.C., if not earlier. In the section on Sanskrit drama in this book, the author has described how in the Hindu tradition the art of the drama with all its ancillary arts and crafts for its background was a creation and a gift of the Gods. The Indian mind was always fond of attributing the finer thing of national culture—and even the cruder things—to a hoary past, to the days of the Gods.

The 5th century B.C. saw the development of another most remarkable creation of the human intellect and aesthetic perception in the ancient Greek drama, and we can trace its formation and early history out of religious ritual connected with the worship of Dionysos, the god of a divine and mystic frenzy, arising out of the primitive 'goat dances', with dialogues, and the dialogue part gradually predominated in the finished Greek drama by the addition of more and more personages who spoke and who in this way expressed dramatically an episode from the traditional story cycles. Greek tragedy and comedy of the 5th century B.C. thus became veritable *ktema eis aei*—'a possession forever' for mankind. Greek drama was already a force to reckon with among the Greeks themselves: the ability to recite the plays of Euripides saved the lives of many an Athenian captive condemned to slave labour in Syracuse in the course of the Peloponnesian War. It was assumed by some scholars that since the ancient Greeks and the ancient Indians came into such intimate contact with each other from the 4th century B.C. onwards, and particularly after the invasion of India and the conquest of part of the country by Alexander the Great, it was but natural to expect that Greek drama should influence Indian drama. And some support was sought for this theory in the Sanskrit word for 'the curtain', *yavanika*, which is an indispensable word in Sanskrit drama, as it refers to an important item in stage-craft. The word *yavanika* was looked upon as being connected with *Yavana*, the ancient Indian word to mean 'a Greek' (this is the 6th century B.C. Greek word *Iavones*,

which became contracted to *Iaones* and then *Iones*, the Ionian branch of the Greeks, who were nearest to the peoples of Western Asia as well as India and whose name became the common appellation for the Greek people as a whole among the Semitic peoples, cf. Hebrew *Yawan*, Arabic *Ywn* or *Yun*, and gave the Old Persian *Yauna* and Sanskrit *Yavana*, Prakrit *Yona*). But a more likely interpretation has been found for this word—it is a Middle Indo-Aryan or Prakrit modification of an Old Indo-Aryan or Sanskrit word *yamanika* from the root *yam*, meaning 'to bind, to fix', used for a curtain with ropes to fix it. Greek tragedy and early Attic comedy as in Aristophanes are totally different in spirit from Sanskrit drama, and they present a different world and consequently there cannot be any doubt that Sanskrit drama had an origin independent of Greek drama. It is not unlikely that Indians from the 3rd century B.C. to the time of the Kushanas might have had occasion to see performances of Greek plays by Greek settlers in India, but they were not in the least affected in their own dramatic art and expression by Greek tragedy. It is more probable that the Indian tradition in the art of the drama was already fully formed when Greek drama came to the knowledge of Indians.

There is, however, one possibility. Neo-Attic comedy as in the plays of Menander has a certain similarity with Sanskrit drama. Tragedy is wholly absent in Indian drama, and Sanskrit drama presents either a more serious and exalted type which deals with the deeds of the heroes and heroines of Hindu myths and legends, or a less exalted, if more popular, type which deals with the lives of contemporary people, both aristocratic and ordinary. Sanskrit drama of this type is a veritable comedy of manners, which has a unique place in the gallery of what may be called 'a Hall of Ancient Man' in world literature. We may be permitted to postulate a possible connection between the Sanskrit comedy of manners and its Greek equivalent. But one cannot be dogmatic about it either way. The technique of Sanskrit drama was quite different from that of the Greek, and a large part of the total output of Sanskrit drama is taken up by the conventional treatment of loves and intrigues in the court of a polygamous king in ancient India, the like of which is not

found in Greek drama. Sanskrit plays dealing with the lives of commoners as well as princely aristocrats agree in spirit with the comedies of Shakspere and the plays of Moliere, for instance.

The earliest specimens of drama in ancient India are found in the fragments of some Buddhistic dramas attributed to Asvaghosha, the court poet of the Indo-Scythian king, Kanishka, of the 1st-2nd century A.D., and these already indicate the formation of the Indian drama type. Before Kalidasa, the greatest poet and dramatist of classical Sanskrit in India, who flourished c. 400 A.D., there were a number of other dramatic poets whose names were recorded by Kalidasa himself. Among these was the great Bhasa, and one of the most sensational discoveries in ancient Indian literature made in this century was the discovery of the 13 dramas, attributed to Bhasa, in the extreme south of India, Kerala or Malabar, in manuscripts written in the local script. Their publication started a controversy about the origins of Sanskrit drama, a controversy in which even the authenticity of these plays and their date have been questioned, some scholars bringing the date down to several centuries after Kalidasa. But the archaic character of the plays is quite clear. Prior to Kalidasa came Sudraka, the author of the *Mrichchhakatika* or 'the Little Clay-Cart,' a comedy depicting Indian society of the 1st to 3rd centuries after Christ in a vivid and telling manner, and it has become part of world literature. Ancient Indian drama has given to the world a number of immortal works which have been accepted by lovers of literature and lovers of man everywhere as a great heritage of mankind. The most important Sanskrit drama and one of the most famous in world literature is of course the incomparable *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa, which evoked the admiration of Goethe, among others. The plays of Bhasa, the play of Sudraka, the plays of Kalidasa, and those of Bhavabhuti (8th century A.D.), besides a few others, are among the representative productions of ancient Indian literature.

Music and dance obviously formed an essential feature of Indian plays. As for the stage and decoration, we have little direct evidence, but an elaborate stage seems to have existed

although such properties as painted scenes, as we have in modern times, were absent. But a curtain as a background and as a means of ingress and egress, both from the centre and the sides, seemed to have had a prominent place. There was also an orchestra. Judging from the various types of mediaeval drama which we find in the later periods in India, the audience sat o . the ground facing the stage, seats of honour being provided for the more exalted spectators. Like all great things in art, Sanskrit drama ran its course, and with the altered political situation an inevitable decline set in. Ancient Indian drama was a reflection of actual life, which we see from the language it employed. According to the tradition of Sanskrit drama, the more exalted characters speak in Sanskrit and the others speak in a variety of Middle Indo-Aryan or Prakrit. This was the situation (or at least the ideal) in the centuries immediately before Christ, particularly in North India. This tradition persisted, so that Sanskrit drama used standard literary classical Sanskrit supported by spoken vernaculars in more or less stylised or literary form. Although the masses continued to understand it and appreciate it, Sanskrit drama gradually became a literary pastime for learned scholars, who were patronised by the Hindu kings all over India. Latterly, it became essentially a court art.

The conquest of India by the Turks brought about the suppression of the native Indian (Hindu) ruling houses and put a stop to the further development and even continuance of the traditions of Sanskrit drama. All over India, right down to our times, isolated scho ars, however, continued the tradition more or less as a literary exercise. When Sanskrit drama was lost as a living form, and when under the pressure of invading Muslims, the Indian or Hindu culture and way of life were both being modified, attempts at literary self-expression were made after 1200 A.D. through all types of literature. Thus in literature, short lyrics in the various North Indian vernaculars began to take shape, giving expression to both religious sentiments and sentiments of l ve among the people. The great South Indian literary languages began a more intensive literary life after 1000 A.D. This took place very largely under the influence of classical Sanskrit literature. In both North Indian and South Indian

languages, translations or adaptations of the great religious classics of ancient India, the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the various *Puranas* were undertaken. In drama also, we find a new tradition coming into vogue. In Eastern India, for example, we come across a kind of drama, with elementary dialogues of two or more actors accompanied by songs, which seems to have made its appearance first in Bengal and Northern Bihar (Mithila) and then to have spread all over Eastern India—Assam and Orissa as well as Nepal. This was a new type, the germs of which are perhaps to be seen in the *Gita-Govinda* of Jayadeva (end of the 12th century A.D.). In the 17th century and possibly earlier, in Nepal also drama of a similar type developed, and quite a large number of such dramas in Nepal owe their origin to the Newar kings at Patan, Bhatgaon, Kantipur or Kathmando and Kirtipur. A noteworthy feature of these dramas is that the themes are taken from the Sanskrit epics and the *Puranas*, and also from the folk epics in the modern Indo-Aryan languages current in Eastern India, as for example, the story of Raja Gopichandra and his mother Queen Mainamati. These plays were written and performed—or rather the songs in them were sung in classical Hindu melodies—before the Nepal kings whose mother tongue was Tibeto-Burman Newari, but who understood the various Aryan languages and dialects spoken in neighbouring areas. The stage directions are in Newari, the prose conversation sometimes in Bengali, sometimes in Maithili or in Kosali or Awadhi, and the songs are also, in these dialects, but mostly in Maithili. This kind of drama is structurally of the type of the Hindustani (Urdu or Hindi) song play, *Indar Sabha*, which was, as far as we know, a solitary work composed by Amanat, about 1853, in the court of King Wazid Ali Shah, the last independent ruler of Oudh (Awadh). The popularity of *Indar Sabha* was undoubtedly one of the factors responsible for the new development in the art of the drama in Hindustani (Hindi and Urdu) in modern times.

South India has also its characteristic dramatic tradition. However, in India nothing is wholly independent, for the various local types of culture, including their literary expressions, are all interlinked, although with certain remarkable develop-

ments in some cases (developments which may have their germs in elements independent of Sanskrit or the North Indian tradition). A case in point is the treatment of love (*akam*) and war (*puram*) in the most ancient Tamil poetry, as in the so-called 'Sangam literature', which in its subject-matter and literary form goes back to the centuries immediately before and after Christ. In South India we have also special types of dance-drama which developed in their own way, but these were mainly on the basis of the pre-Muslim, pan-Indian Hindu tradition. This old Hindu tradition has been linked up with the sage Bharata, who is traditionally the first exponent of Hindu drama in both theory and practice. The Sanskrit work, *Bharata-Natya Sastra,* which is ascribed to him (and which has recently been translated into English by Dr. Manomohan Ghosh and published by the Asiatic Society of Calcutta), is believed by scholars to go back to the 4th century A.D. at the latest.

As in Christian Western Europe in mediaeval times, in India too, under the influence of religion, new kinds of dramatic expression began to evolve in various parts of the country. A noteworthy form of this was the Bengali *Pala-gan* and *Jatra.* The *Pala-gan* was a kind of narrative recitation or a *Purana* legend which was divided into various episodes (*palas*), but the leader of the recitation and one or two of his associates would occasionally indulge in dialogue. The *Jatras* evidently grew out of such dialogues. The word *Jatra* means 'a religious procession,' and in this procession sometimes there were persons dressed as Gods and Heroes. A combination of the spirit of the *Pala-gan* and the religious procession was evidently at the root of mediaeval Bengali *jatra.* It was a kind of primitive drama without any scenes, the actors suitably dressed performed for the audience, who sat around them in a circle. They were supported by an orchestra of common Indian instruments and here was more singing than acting. This might be preceded as well as followed by comic skits (*Song* or *Swang*) which were of a social or satirical character. These *jatras* had their greatest vogue during the 19th century in Bengal. One comes across similar performances in the other parts of India also.

In South India, the Sanskrit tradition lingered, and it was

dance rather than drama proper which attracted the attention of creative artists there. Thus we have in Kerala the Kathakali, a kind of classical dance drama which is peculiarly its own. But this is not drama in the true sense of the term. The masques as well as the elaborate painting of the faces in the style of grotesque masks which we find in the Indian dance dramas and the Kathakali have a superficial resemblance to the masques used in Japanese No plays and the face-painting of Japanese *Kabuki* and Chinese opera, but there does not seem to be any direct connexion between the dramatic art of India on the one hand and that of China and Japan on the other, although in the latter countries drama is as great an art as produced anywhere else in the world. On the other hand, the Indonesian (Javanese) dance and drama fall within the same circle as Indian dance and drama, in so far as the former is of Hindu inspiration.

It is clear that modern drama in India is a composite art, the result of diverse literary influences. It has, however, developed far from uniformly in the country. It has therefore been felt that the development of drama in the modern Indian languages needed the fostering care of the Government. The establishment in New Delhi of the *Sangeet Natak Akadami* (National Academy of Dance Drama and Music,) under government auspices marks a milestone in this respect. It has branches in every part of India and much is expected of it.

Whether Indian drama will be able to hold its own against the aggressive impact of the cinema has still to be seen. But the fact remains that India has made significant contributions to the world's dramatic literature. A series of works of outstanding merit and beauty produced by her most talented dramatists, in ancient India, and also during modern times, under European influence, furnishes a unique record for at least 2,000 years from the predecessors of Bhasa and Sudraka down to Girischandra Ghosh and Rabindranath Tagore. The story of the development of Indian drama in the various languages of India has been briefly unfolded in the accounts which have been prepared by writers who are familiar with their subject and which together form the present volume.

SANSKRIT DRAMA

G.T. Deshpande

Indian tradition points to the divine origin of Sanskrit drama. But many scholars have dismissed this as having no historical value and have propounded hypotheses regarding its origin. The chief among them are (1) that drama in India originated from the recitals of the dialogue hymns of the Vedas during sacrificial ceremonies and (2) that it originated from the dumb puppet shows. Recently Prof. R.V. Jagirdar of Karnatak College, Dharwar, has put forward another hypothesis that Indian drama has its origin in the Suta tradition of the *Puranas*. In these circumstances it would be advisable for us to reexamine the traditional account given by the *Natya Sastra* and try to understand what Indians have to say about their own drama.

In olden times, so runs the traditional account, at the advent of the Treta-Yuga conditions in Jambudvipa were not quite safe. Life had been vulgar (ग्राम्यधर्मप्रवृत्ते) ; dissension, selfishness and jealousy were rampant (कामलोभवशंगते, ईर्ष्याक्रोधादिसंमूढे). Grieved at this, Indra, accompanied by the other gods, approached God Brahma, and said to him, "We desire to have a play that could be seen and heard as well. The Sudras have no rightful access to the Vedas. Kindly, therefore, create a fifth Veda which would be accessible to all the varnas without exception (सार्ववर्णिकः)." Brahma agreed. He took material from the existing Vedas and created the *Natya Veda* wherein the text (पाठ्य) was taken from the *Rig-Veda*, the music from the *Sama*, the action from the *Yajus* and Rasa (or artistic flavour) from the *Atharvan*. This was a silent revolution brought about by Brahma and was acceptable to both the old and the new world. Brahma then said to Indra, "Here I have created a piece of history (इतिहास) for you; this you should produce with the help of the gods." But Indra pleaded his inability to do so. Brahma then entrusted the work to Bharata. Bharata was a man of keen insight, talent, and practical sense ; he had, moreover, a

band of a hundred sons to assist him. He took up the work, but soon found that it was not possible to produce the play unless he had ladies as well to act with. Brahma, accordingly, sent the Apsarases to him. Narada and other divine musicians also joined and soon the play was ready for the stage.

The play was staged in the open at the Banner Festival (ध्वजमह) of Indra. The theme was 'the defeat of the demons by the gods ' (यथा दैत्याः सुरैः जिताः). The demons naturally were upset at seeing that they had been repudiated. They created an uproar during the performance, so it became necessary to have a playhouse.

The next performance was given in a playhouse. By this time the sage Bharata also had grown wise by experience. Instead of enacting a scene of battle between the gods and the demons, in this play (समवकार) *Amrita-manthana* (अमृतमन्थन), the gods and the demons were shown as working in co-operation. The performance was a great success. Brahma, then, introduced Bharata to Lord Siva before whom the sage gave a performance of a Dima, Tripura Daha (त्रिपुरदाह). He was so pleased with Bharata's art that he advised him to add dance to drama (*N.S.*Ch. I).

This is the account of the divine origin of Sanskrit drama, but it is not without a worldly counterpart. The applause that they received from all quarters filled Bharata's sons with pride, and they hastened to stage a farce defamatory to the sages, who cursed the Bharatas sending them down to the earth to be born there as Sudras. Since then the descendants of Bharata have been condemned to live on earth as Sudras. With the royal patronage of King Nahusha, these Sudra progeny of Bharata have been able to spread the art of drama in the world (*N.S.* XXXVI).

It is true that these are not facts of history as we understand them today. None the less, it will be agreed, that they epitomise a tradition about drama and the people concerned with its production. Let us analyse them and try to see if they contain any grain of truth.

The earthly descendants of the divine Bharata are Sudras. This is the most striking point in the story; it is corroborated by other evidence also. The band of Bharatas (भरतानां विकल्पनम्), as described in the *Natya Sastra*, consists of Mukutakara,

Malayakara, Silpi, Karu, Kusilava, Ganika etc., who according to the *Dharmasastra* are Sudras; Chanakya in his *Arthasastra* describes 'singing and dancing' as the duties of Sudras (शूद्रस्य द्विजातिशुश्रूषा वार्ता कारुकुशीलव कर्म च). Manu finds no offence if any one converses with an actor's wife (VIII. 362); and, lastly Nahusha, the royal patron of these actors, has been declared to be a veteran foe of Indra, the lord of the Aryan gods (*Rig-Veda* X.99.7).

Now, if Bharata's descendants were Sudras, can we suppose that they were allowed to recite and put into action the dialogue hymns of the Vedas before an assembly of the three higher varnas, and that too during the sacrifices ? It should be particularly noted here that, according to the Indian notion, drama is not a written text or dialogue; it is a recital set in action. When the Sudras were debarred from even the recital of hymns, how could they be tolerated putting these to action on a public stage ? It follows that if Sudras were to be allowed to recite and act any dialogues, they could not be anything other than the Vedic dialogue hymns. Now, Bharata tells us that his *Natya-Veda* was open to all the varnas; that it was created as the extant Vedas were not accessible to the Sudras; and yet it contained the essence of the four Vedas. Such a form however could only be of literature, the epic and puranic literature. Thus, we must go back to the recital of the epics and the *Puranas*, and not to that of the Vedic dialogue hymns, to discover the origin of Indian drama.

The principal reciter of the epic and puranic dialogues is the famous Suta . That the Sutradhara of Bharata is a stage substitute of the Pauranika Suta has been clearly established in Prof. R.V. Jagirdar's *Drama in Sanskrit literature.* If this view is accepted, then not only does the dumb puppet show theory fall to the ground but certain stages of development can also be reasonably conjectured. The Sutradhara might have evolved from the puranic Suta through four stages which exactly correspond to the four stages of the Natya-Vrittis.

SUTA RECITALS	NATYA VRITTIS
(1) Post-epic Suta reciting epic and puranic dialogues ..	..BHARATI VRITTI
(2) Suta reciting in company of musicians	

(कुशीलव); we have evidence of the
Ramayana in this respect .. ..SATVATI VRITTI

(3) Epic dialogues recited after the costumes
are put on and with Nati KAISIKI VRITTI

(4) Epic dialogues divided into scenes
with music and dance .. ..ARBHATI VRITTI.

The chapter on Vrittis in *Natya sastra* shows that the Vrittis developed in this very order. God Brahma discovered them as he witnessed the fight between Vishnu and Madhukaitabha and, curiously enough, the first performance on the heavenly stage referred to a battle between the gods and the demons. Again, Bharata describes ten types of stage performances (रूपक) ranging from a monologue (भाण) to full-fledged drama (नाटक, प्रकरण) and his division is based on the number of Vrittis in a performance.

Prastavana, Vishkambhaka and Pravesaka are peculiar features of Sanskrit drama. In Prastavana, the Sutradhara introduces the story, and Vishkambhaka and Pravesaka are interludes connecting one scene with another. The question is how did these three features of the drama come to be connected with these functions ? Let us start from the epic dialogues. The *Mahabharata* consists only of dialogues, the speeches being introduced by such remarks as *Bhishma uvacha*, *Bhima uvacha*, *Arjuna uvacha*, *Draupadi uvacha*, *Suta uvacha*, and so on. These remarks are not part of the story. They simply indicate who is to speak what. Now Bhima, Arjuna, Draupadi and others are characters of the story. But who is this Suta and what does he say ? Suta is not a character of the *Mahabharata*. He comes only to introduce the characters, to tell about the time and place, to tell what happened before and after a particular dialogue. Thus, Suta comes, introduces the characters and situations and then disappears, leaving the characters to go on with their speeches; and reappears only at the end of the dialogue or at the beginning of the next dialogue. Now, in a drama much of Suta's function devolves on Pravesaka and Vishkambhaka. In their absence, it would be the Sutradhara or Sthapaka, the stage substitute of the Suta, who would do this work. When Vishkambhaka and Pravesaka are present, the Sutradhara has

only to introduce the play in Prastavana and then disappear to come only at the end to recite Bharata Vakya. It is to be remembered here that the Prastavana and the Bharata Vakya are not part of the drama. These parallels between the structure of the epic and that of the drama seem to establish the closer relation between them. In addition, Bharata insists that the hero of the drama must be a mythological god or a king. It is noteworthy that originally it was a duty of Suta to praise and describe the gods and kings. He was the custodian of the stories about them. Hence, as Prof. R.V. Jagirdar observes, "Sanskrit drama has least to do with religion and religious rites," and further, "it was the post-epic Suta and not the puppet shows that originated dramatic representation; .... and from its beginning to its death Sanskrit drama took its hero from the Suta and the epics that he recited, and never from the religious lore or from the host of Vedic gods."

Thus, the art of dramatic representation in India was the creation of the people from the life they lived and saw, as every good art is; they took their stories and heroes from the history and mythology which Suta preserved for them; and they took their inspiration from the *Sarvavarnika Veda*, namely the epics and the *Puranas* and not from the *Traivarnika Veda*. If this is so, then even with the small number of Sanskrit plays that are available to us today, we can hope to trace the broad stages in the history of this art.

(2)

The earliest available dramatic works are the thirteen plays ascribed to Bhasa (Circa 200—300 A.D.). Asvaghosha came earlier and has also a play, *Sariputra-Prakarana*, to his credit, but it has come down to us in fragments. Even about Bhasa's plays, scholars are not at one on their authorship. But this is of little consequence; the plays themselves stand testimony to their antiquity because of the manner and style in which they are written. These plays taken together reveal their dual character, epic and artistic. Scenes of *Svapna*, *Pratima-darsana* and the like reveal the dramatic talent of the author, but there is much that is also epic. Most of the plays are drawn from the famous epics, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and perhaps *Hari-Vamsa*; and they betray epic manner of construc-

tion. It is true that most of the Sanskrit plays are drawn from the epics and there is a fundamental difference between the plays of Bhasa and those of the later writers. For example, Rama of Bhavabhuti is a hero of Bhavabuti's conception; he is an ideal king, a loving husband, a man caught in the conflict of duties and trying to find a way out. He is great but not superhuman or divine. Contrast him with Rama in Bhasa's *Abhisheka*, who is wholly divine. Even in Bhasa's plays this contrast is noticeable; Rama in *Abhisheka* is a god, while Rama in *Pratima* is a hero created by the dramatist. The same is true of Krishna appearing in these plays; he uses his divine powers and once he manifests his divine form also. The style is narrative in the epic manner, and the author has a partiality for Anushtubh which is the principal epic metre. The life depicted in the plays is more akin to the life of the epic period. These plays are forceful and move with speed, and yet they lack harmony and delicacy which are essential for dramatic art. Bhasa's plays represent a stage where drama is on the threshold of art, and yet its leanings are towards the old epic form.

Bhasa has given us a few fine tragedies. In *Duta-Vakya*, *Duta-Ghatotkacha*, and *Urubhanga*, Duryodhana is the hero. Here Duryodhana is not the Duryodhana of the epic tradition — a sinful intriguing son of Dhritarashtra. He figures here as a true representative of the author's own age, an arrogant, adventurous and harsh, but reasonable ruler. Yet inevitable doom darkens the life of such a character. Karna in *Karnabhara* is noble in the extreme and is made a victim of his own nobility. In all these plays, the hero is placed high above the other characters and made to suffer and, what is more, suffer through his own greatness. Bhasa's plays are thus symbols of his age and they represent the first advance towards art.

According to tradition, Bhasa was a Dhavaka, a man of low caste.

Against this background, we have the art of Kalidasa (Circa 400 A.D.). Until his days, drama was inspired by the epics, had a narrative form, and the dramatist was more of a moralist than an artist. With Kalidasa, drama reaches the full height of artistic creation. He wrote three plays, *Malavi-*

kagnimitra, *Vikramorvasiya*, and the famous *Sakuntala*. In all these he is engaged in a new experiment. For him drama is what life is. It is Loka-Charita-darsana in all its triple complex as he declares in *Malavikagnimitra* (1.4):

त्रैगुण्योद्भवमत्र लोकचरितं नानारसं दृश्यते ।
नाट्यं भिन्नरुचेर्जनस्य बहुधाप्येकं समाराधनम् ॥

And what is interesting is that Kalidasa is conscious of his new effort. He knows that Bhasa, Saumilla and Kaviputra have a considerable hold over the audience; he also knows that ordinary vulgar tastes will hardly applaud his attempt, yet he persists, confident of the fact that he would receive proper recognition at the hands of a class of discriminating connoisseurs (*Malavika* 1.2). In *Malavikagnimitra* which is a harem play, it is not so much the story as the manner of its composition that attracts our attention. Here, Kalidasa has made artistic use of the dance, while in *Vikramorvasiya* he has introduced new modes of music. The flower of his genius is *Sakuntala*. Only for the bare skeleton of the story can he be said to have been indebted to *Mahabharata*, everything else is the poet's own. It is a true picture of what life means for Kalidasa who has created an immortal world out of mortal clay. *Sakuntala* is a play in which earth and heaven unite, in which human life gets sympathy even from the animal and vegetable world; and in which once and for all, harmony and unity of the Universe is established, felt, and realised when we find that Sakuntala is Vanajyotsna and Vanajyotsna is Sakuntala and both of them grow, unite, suffer, and reunite in the same way. They are sisters, nay, they are one. Men and women in *Sakuntala* are the artist's creation; they are as the poet wants them to be, and not as they are in mythology. Dushyanta and Sakuntala, Kanva and his pupils, the two unforgettable young women bound by ties of friendship, even the fisherman and the shrewd guardians of the law are perfectly human; and the magic touch of Kalidasa makes even the faults and failings lovable and capable of appreciation. So he sets before us a new standard of art.

Mrichchhakatika ascribed to Sudraka is another play of this type. There even revelry has its own beauty. Everything

here is unbelievably strange and yet perfectly true. A young and wealthy courtesan in love with a poor brahmin, a haughty Sakara committing crimes and ever justifying them, a gambler being chased in the open street, a thief busy with his nimble fingers, carters dolefully going their way, and above all, mischief asserting itself on the altar of Justice—all these are strange and yet how true! Things we hate in our own lives, we love in drama. Sudraka made clever use of Basantasena's ornaments at every turn in the story.

Kalidasa and Sudraka have created true art. Their works became models for generations to come, and for the less gifted to imitate. It is very probable that Bharata's old booklet on dramaturgy was revised at this stage; standard rules of drama were introduced on the models of Kalidasa and Sudraka; and thus we have full-fledged *Natya Sastra.* Scholars believe that certain parts of the present *Natya Sastra* are interpolations, and the second chapter dealing with the construction of a playhouse is one of these interpolations.

With the standardisation of dramatic art on the models of Kalidasa and Sudraka, came the age, not of creation but of imitation and repetition. This is exemplified in the plays of Harsha, the famous king of Kanouj,—*Priyadarsika*, *Ratnavali* and *Nagananda*. Harsha had undoubted poetic gifts. He had imagination and fancy but these alone do not make a dramatist. Harsha succeeds as a poet but fails as a dramatist. The reason is obvious. He writes not because he has anything to say, but because he wants to be recognised as a dramatist in his own right. He, therefore, submits his art to technique. According to later critics, *Ratnavali* exhibits all the technicalities of the science of drama. Harsha's plays reflected a stage when drama had become stereotyped.

An artist of strong will, ability, and imagination was required to retrieve Sanskrit drama from this blind alley. Bhavabhuti (Circa 700 A.D.) and Visakhadatta (Circa 800 A.D.) came to the rescue. Visakhadatta wrote *Mudra-Rakshasa*, a play dealing with Chandragupta and Chanakya, and showed that even political intrigue can become a subject of good art. Among the Sanskrit dramatists known to us Visakhadatta is the one and the only one of his type. He is

said to have written another play *Devi-Chandragupta*, based on the life of Chandragupta II. It is available only in fragments, but the authority of Visakhadatta is unmistakable. Bhavabhuti wrote *Mahavira-Charita*, *Malati-Madhava*, and *Uttara-Rama-Charita* and gave such a turn to drama that the Indian stage was revolutionised. The fact that his plays do not conform to fixed rules of the science and yet appeal to lovers of the theatre only goes to prove that he infused new life into the old art. It is not for nothing that he has been given a place by the side of Kalidasa; and some even say that in *Uttar Rama* he is superior to the old master.

Bhavabhuti had many imitators. We find that *Anargha-Raghava* of Murari, *Bala Ramayana* of Rajasekhara and *Prasanna-Raghava* of Jayadeva are all produced on the models of Bhavabhuti, but none of them show dramatic talent and all have been failures. Bhavabhuti and Visakhadatta were the last of the giants; after them Sanskrit drama declined. Those that followed had no drama left in them; they were 'Champus' in the guise of drama; and this tendency went to such an extent that Krishnamisra wrote *Prabodha-Chandrodaya* which is philosophy in the form of dialogues.

As a result, Sanskrit drama lost its public appeal; it came to be restricted to a small circle of intellectual Pandits only. The gulf between the common spectator and Sanskrit drama continued to widen. Other dramatic forms known as Uparupakas (उपरूपक) gradually developed. These were mostly in Prakrit.

HINDI DRAMA AND THEATRE

J.C. Mathur

Hindi drama has in some ways had a richer and more varied tradition than a number of other dramatic literatures of India, but unfortunately, this tradition has almost been forgotten in recent times. From the 15th to the 19th centuries, there was a flourishing court theatre based upon the Vaishnava movement and patronised by the ruling dynasties of Mithila, Nepal, Bundelkhand and Assam. As many as 106 plays were written by over 35 dramatists during these three or four centuries, and thus a drama which owed its poetic beauty to its heritage in Sanskrit, its inspiration to the devotional songs of Vidyapati and Chandidas and its flexible form to the folk festivals, continued as a living institution in large parts of the Hindi-speaking regions.

When Bharatendu Harishchandra, the great architect of modern Hindi literature, began writing in 1867, the Vaishnava drama had been so greatly attenuated that it had very nearly been forgotten altogether and it is doubtful if Bharatendu had any direct knowledge of it. However, certain features of the Vaishnava drama had survived through the Bengali folk stage, the *jatra* Parties, and are perceptible in his *Vidya-Sundar* (1868) whose story is similar to a play, *Vidya-Vilap*, written in 1720. Bharatendu's best known play, *Satya Harishchandra* has a theme on which, in 1651, the Maithili play *Harishchandra Natyam* had been based. The importance which Bharatendu gave to songs composed on well known Ragas and Raginis and interspersed in between scenes and acts is a distinct influence of the Vaishnava drama. It is a pity that in recent Hindi dramas this pleasant practice of introducing lyrics has been discarded in the name of naturalism, for its disappearance removed one of the links between the literary and the folk play.

During his relatively brief literary career of 18 years (1867—1885), Bharatendu rehabilitated drama as a literary form in Hindi, harmonised diverse dramatic styles and laid the

foundations of the amateur stage. Though Bharatendu found several of his plots in contemporary life and chose for translation plays into which he could introduce references to the social and political problems of his age, the form that he chose for his dramatic writings was basically in the Sanskrit tradition. Even *Bharat Durdasha*, which seems almost a modern problem play, follows the pattern of the Sanskrit classic *Prabodha-Chandrodaya*. Still, his modern approach is all-pervasive and unmistakable; his incomplete play *Prem Jogini* is a precursor of the realistic drama; in *Bharat Janani* and a few other plays he gave a glimpse of nascent nationalism which became the principal inspiration of subsequent playwrights.

As indicated earlier, Bharatendu was much more a man of the theatre than an armchair playwright. Under his leadership and influence a theatre group was formed, the members of which used to stage Hindi plays and shared with Bharatendu the distinction of writing for the stage a number of the earliest popular Hindi plays of the 19th century. To this Bharatendu school of playwrights belonged Devakinandan Tripathi, author of *Sita Haran*, Shivanandan Sahai, who wrote *Krishna-Sudama*, Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya who wrote *Rukmini-Parinaya*, Radha Charan Goswami, author of *Sudama* and *Amar Singh Rathour*, Balkrishna Bhatt, author of *Damyanti Swayambar* and *Veni-Sanghar*, Lala Shrinivas Das who wrote *Randhir-Prem-Mohini*, Radha Krishna Das who wrote *Dukhini Bala* and *Maharana Pratap*, Kishori Lal Goswami who wrote *Mayanka Manjari* and *Natya Sambhav*, etc., etc. Hardly any of these playwrights had Bharatendu's genius, but they endeavoured to futher the nationalistic outlook and the reformist zeal of their master, although in a play like *Randhir-Prem-Mohini*, the love theme predominates. It was, however, a matter of surprise and disappointment that after Bharatendu's death this group of disciples gradually turned away from drama and most of its members took to writing poetry or novels. Perhaps this was partly the result of the strong attraction which the new language of poetry (Khari-Boli) and the new form of story writing (novel) had for talented and promising writers. It is also true that these people ceased to have direct contact with the theatre but those among them who were able to retain this

contact did not fly from its spell.

The amateur stage for which the disciples of Bharatendu continued to write was one of the lasting contributions of Bharatendu. It arose out of a reaction against the commercial Parsi theatre. This theatre was in a sense a continuation of the courtly experiment of Awadh—*Indar Sabha* of which the script was written by Amanat and which was staged under the personal direction and patronage of the last Nawab of Awadh. Though superficially the production of *Indar Sabha* was affected by the Urdu romantic lyric, structurally as well as in environmental effects, it followed the 19th century European Opera of the undistinguished variety. The Parsi theatre, in which romantic lyricism was debased into meaningless verse recitation, tried to copy the spectacular form of the early 19th century western theatre, without approaching the broad human plane of the contemporary western drama. About 1870, Pestonji Framji started the 'Original Theatrical Company'; in 1877 Khurshidji Balliwala opened the 'Victoria Theatrical Company' in Delhi and even took out his troupe once to Britain. A contemporary enterprise was the 'Alfred Theatrical Company' of Kavasji Khatau which for a long time held the field. These early ventures were followed by such commercial successes as the 'New Alfred Company,' the 'Old Parsi Theatrical Company,' the 'Alexandria Company,' the 'Corinthian Company', etc., which flourished in Calcutta, Bombay, and the principal cities of North India right up to 1930 and of which one of the few survivors is the 'Minerva Theatrical Company' of Calcutta.

Bharatendu was struck by the enormous thirst of the people for drama and he tried to satisfy it through a more aesthetically adequate medium in the form of the amateur stage. Ordinarily, no amateur stage can compete with a commercial stage. Had Bharatendu been able to get financial backing for this type of theatre at that time, the history of the Hindi stage would probably have been very different. As it was, he had to fall back upon the amateur pattern of which the significance lay in its being a kind of laboratory for the better type of drama. It is these laboratories that have enabled the Hindi drama to survive and to make a new beginning in recent times. After

Bharatendu, one of the first theatre groups was started in Kanpur in 1888. This was followed by the establishment in 1898 of Shri Ramlila Natak Mandali and in 1908 of the 'Hindi Natya Samiti' in Allahabad, both of which were results of the enthusiasm of Pandit Madhava Shukla and his friends. Some important plays '*Siya Swayambar*', *Maharana Pratap* and *Mahabharat Purbardha* were for the first time presented by these amateur troupes. In Banaras, two theatre groups known as 'Bharatendu Natak Mandali' and 'Kashi Nagrik Natak Mandali' were started in 1909 at the initiative of Brijchand of Bharatendu's family and other people, and they produced serveral plays not only of Bharatendu but of subsequent writers also. Pandit Madhava Shukla was responsible for another noteworthy institution, the Hindi Natya Parishad of Calcutta, which continued to be a lone citadel of taste in the midst of the commercialised entertainment of the Parsi Theatrical Companies of Calcutta. Many of these amateur groups were inspired by the example and followed the tradition of Bharatendu, and some derived inspiration from the western theatre. Stage decorations and curtains could not escape the influence of the bizarre colour fantasy of the Parsi theatre but in these plays the emphasis was not so much on the spectacular and the miraculous, but on chaste expression, poetically satisfying songs and noble, though somewhat sentimental, idealism. The cast often included important men of high society. Somehow the character of this amateur stage began to change about 1925. Adults ceased to take part in the performances and the amateur stage came to be regarded as exclusively for students. This was unfortunate, for it led to drama being considered as of little social significance. However, it also meant that under the influence of Universities and colleges the amateur stage turned more and more towards experimentation and the intellectual approach.

Between 1900 and 1925, when both the Parsi theatre and the amateur theatre were co-existent, two types of playwrights dominated the Hindi drama. Agha Hashr Kashmiri, Pandit Radhe Shyam Pathak, Narayan Prasad 'Betab', Tulsi Dutt 'Shaida', and Hari Krishna 'Jauhar' were some of the names that every theatre-goer of those days knew.

Writing not so much for publication as at the behest of the proprietors of the Parsi theatres, these men made use of the commonly understood Hindustani language and tried to enliven the slow unfolding of the plot by a liberal sprinkling of couplets, passionate dialogues, miraculous scenes and parallel, though unrelated, comic episodes and tomfooleries. Of the numerous plays thrown up by this group very few have survived the test of time and probably the most noteworthy among them was *Veer Abhimanyu* of Radhe Shyam Pathak which echoes the genuine idealism of Bharatendu. The other stream of writers in this period kept to the Bharatendu tradition. Badrinath Bhatt who wrote *Kuru-Vana-Dahan* and *Chungi-Ki-Umedwari* was the best known among these playwrights. Pandit Madhava Shukla was the real leader of the group, although he wrote only *Siya-Swayambar* and *Mahabharat Purbardha*. Of the others, mention may be made of Anand Prasad Khatri, Jamuna Prasad Mehra, Durga Prasad Gupta, Haridas Manik and Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi. The last one wrote *Krishna-Arjun Yuddha* which can perhaps be regarded as the best single play of this period.

Against this fairly unimpressive historical background, Jaya Shankar Prasad appeared as a meteor, brilliant, but seemingly short lived. Did he at all belong to the tradition, however attenuated, of the Hindi stage and drama? That he ignored the contemporary stage is clear enough, nor did he find the dramatic technique of the playwrights of the Bharatendu period acceptable. The sharp departure from tradition will be clear on comparing Prasad's *Chandragupta* and Bharatendu's *Mudra-Rakshas*. But beneath this difference is a deeper affinity. Prasad seized upon three noble conceptions inherited from the generation of Bharatendu, patriotism, love of ideals, and faith in the ultimate worthwhileness of existence. These concepts expressed in a plain and obvious form by Bharatendu and his followers were endowed with a finer and subtler expression by Prasad. This suggestive expression was an outstanding feature of what is known as the 'Chhayavadi' trend of Hindi poetry, and in Prasad's plays this technique was responsible for traditionally comprehended emotions and ideals blossoming with a new fragrance and in a new rhythm. Nevertheless, a sharp departure from tradi-

tion is the dominant quality of Prasad's writings and at the root of that boldness and freedom lies the attitude of indifference towards the stage. First, he used an idiom and a phrase so elevated and shrouded with such virtuosity and seriousness as to make Harishchandra's Hindi appear predestrian. Secondly, his characters show that awareness of inner conflict which was unknown to the one-sided heroes or villains of the earlier drama. Thirdly, quite often his characters, while in the midst of an immediate situation, drift into an analysis of certain ultimate principles of human life and thus pass on irresistibly from momentary anxieties to profound thought ; this doubtlessly was a new experience for Hindi drama. As a result of these three novel experiments, Prasad became the founder of a new technique depending primarily upon the building up of an all enveloping atmosphere. One might almost perceive in this attempt to build up a strong, vigorous and dynamic atmosphere, the endeavour to make up for the absence of a suitable stage. Perhaps, Prasad imagined that where the playwright could stimulate the reader's imagination to the creation of a palpable environment, the absence of the stage would not be felt.

Between 1920 and 1933, Prasad wrote practically all his outstanding plays, *Ajatasatru* (1922), *Skanda Gupta* (1928), *Chandra Gupta* (1931) and *Dhruvaswamini* (1933). Did these plays influence subsequent dramatic writings to any extent? Contemporary writers and even those who immediately followed Jaya Shankar Prasad show less pronounced influence than playwrights of 1943 onwards. Strangely enough, even a realist like Lakshmi Narayan Mishra who led a reaction against Prasad's technique during his lifetime has, in his *Vatsraj* published two yeas ago, turned to Prasad's environm ntal technique and love of ancient times. Harikrishna 'Premi', Jagannath Prasad 'Milinda' Govinda Vallabha Pant wrote several plays indirectly influenced by Jaya Shankar Prasad and also by the great Bengali w iter Dwijendra Lal Roy. In Udaya Shankar Bhatt's *Vidrohini-Amba*, *Sagar-Vijaya*, *Matshya-Gandha* and *Vishwamitra* the atmosphere of the mythological age has been effectively recreated ; in *Adim-Yuga* he has been attracted by certain fundamental problems of mankind. Harikrishna 'Premi' has, in his plays *Swapna-Bhanga*, *Raksha-Bandhan*, *Shiva-Sadhana*, etc., given ideal-

istic and emotional glimpse into India's mediaeval history. Though Govinda Vallabha Pant's *Var-Mala* and *Raj-Mukut* lack the profundity of the other three playwrights, his writings have been more successful on the stage for he transmutes the inspiration received from Prasad into tangible stage form through the agency of his first-hand experience of the footlights and the green room. Since 1942-43, however, there has been sudden harking back to Prasad's idealism of humanitarian environmental technique. To this stream of revival belong Ram Kumar Verma's *Charu-Mitra, Dhruv-Tarika* and Benipuri's *Ambapali* and *Netra-Dan,* Prithvinath Sharma's *Urmila,* Dr. Kailash Bhatnagar's *Chanakya-Pratigyan, Shree-Vatsya,* Rani Siva Kumari Devi's *Chandra Gupta* and *Umade,* Kanchanlata Sabbarwal's *Amiyan* and *Aditya Sen Gupta,* Sitaram Chatturvedi's *Senapati-Pushymitra* and several historical plays of Sadguru Saran Awasthi. Apart from these, several younger writers have almost uncritically turned to this technique. This rehabilitation of Prasad is not clearly understandable. Perhaps, one reason is that in most Universities the only dramas prescribed for the Hindi courses are those of Jaya Shankar Prasad with the result that this is the technique and approach with which the average newcomer to Hindi play-writing is well acquainted.

However, as stated earlier, the reaction against Prasad had begun even before his 'school' struck roots. This reaction was brought about by the age and the new situation. Prasad made no effort to build up a stage ; the struggling lights of the Parsi theatre succumbed before the dazzling silver screen and thus the commercial theatre in Hindi collapsed almost at the touch of the modern film. But a salutary result of its collapse was that the earlier films of the New Theatre and the Bombay Talkies proved the suitability for the stage of realistic scenes, culled from day to day social life. The amateur stage that had continued its halting existence since Bharatendu could not but learn the lesson from this experience. The theatre groups of colleges came to realise that the realistic presentation of life, naturalistic conversation and day to day experiences could all be brought within the ambit of the theatre. One other circumstance drove playwrights towards this realisation. After the first wave of 'chhayavad', young writers turned from the poetry of English

romantic literature to the writings of Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov and even to contemporary dramatic literature. Thirdly, also about this time Indian nationalism became more and more analytical of social and economical problems, a tendency which in subsequent literature reappeared in the form of the progressive movement under the inspiration of communist doctrines. Fourthly, Freud's psycho-analysis and the modern outlook on sex fundamentally transformed the love theme in drama. Fifthly, like the short story in the field of fiction, the one-act play came to be in demand. The one-act technique is not unknown in Sanskrit drama and in Hindi, too, Bharatendu himself is credited with having written the first one-act play. But the present-day one-act play in Hindi is a straight derivation from western literature. The amateur stage welcomed the one-act play with open arms because it called for less equipment and stage machinery.

As a result of these circumstances and tendencies, a new kind of play came into vogue about 1930. Of these, the salient features were the naturalistic presentation of life, an analysis of the individual's inner difficulties lying at the root of social problems and contempt for superficial idealism. Perhaps, the first play of this kind was Kripanath Mishra's *Mani-Goswami*, published as early as 1929. This was followed by the series of challenging plays by Lakshmi Narayan Mishra, *Sindoor-ki-Holi*, *Rakshas-ka-Mandir* and *Mukti-ka-Rahashya*. There is nothing wrong in an artist throwing out a challenge to tradition. But this spirit of challenge seems in his case also to have meant an indifference to the needs of the stage. It was left to Ramkumar Verma and to Upendranath Ashk (the latter both in his one-act plays and in longer plays like *Qaid-Aur-Uran*, *Chhata-Beta* and *Adi-marg*) to have attempted and achieved a fair measure of synthesis between the realistic and thoughtful drama on the one hand and the dynamic pace and emotional appeal of the stage on the other. Ashk follows a technique which is clearly well-thought out and planned and yet like a slice out of life and like the fleeting moment of deep experience it is more suggestive than one would suspect. He holds up to society and the individual a mirror that is without a blemish and yet with a depth much greater than its surface. In Seth Govind Das's problem

plays there is a naive indifference to technical perfection as also to the stage; there is also a danger that some of his characters are becoming types. Vrindavan Lal Verma who has a distinguished record as writer of historical romances has been somewhat indiscriminately prolific in his dramatic literature ; it is, however, significant that the majority of his plays deal with contemporary themes and problems. Of the more recent playwrights in this stream, mention may be made of Shambhu Dayal Saksena and Vimala Raina both of whom have turned out to be surprisingly refreshing in their outlook and delightfully spontaneous in their technique. There is more action in their plays than in those of some of the better-known playwrights. It is an encouraging sign that story writers of such eminence as Yashpal and Vishnu Prabhakar have turned to drama ; their first attempts have been widely hailed by Hindi readers.

In 1934, when the problem play was coming into its own in Hindi, Shri Sumitranandan Pant came out with his fantasy, *Jyotsna.* It was an extraordinary experiment which cannot be placed under any definite category and of which the significance lies in its impressive and bold harmony of such diverse elements as a lyrical drama (which can be traced back to Bharatendu and the early Vaishnava drama), a symbolic technique (of which the first example in Sanskrit was *Prabodha-Chandrodaya*) and the intellectual modern outlook motivated by strong desire to go into the roots of cultural experiences.

After 1935, the Hindi stage developed in two directions. On the one hand, the amateur stage originally initiated by Bharatendu established a successful and, let us hope, lasting connection with the literary drama through the medium of the one-act play. On the other hand, Prithviraj managed, in spite of serious difficulties and financial loss, to establish a new type of commercial theatre with a mission to elevate public taste and restore the theatre. The emergence of the one-act play was of historical significance because it came to be written as a direct result of the demand from the stage in transition and in the rebuilding of the stage it has played a formative role. The mission of Prithviraj is a challenge to Hindi playwrights who can transform this mission into a great movement. Prithviraj in *Pathan, Ahuti* and *Kalakar* has set forth a bold example which has, how-

ever, to be followed with caution since a rather gushing sentimentalism brings most of his plays dangerously near melodrama.

The radio play is a new literary form which has indirectly helped the theatre by stimulating several Hindi writers to write plays. Some features of the old Sanskrit drama are reappearing in a different form under the stress of radio technique ; the Vachak and Vachika seem to bear a close resemblance to Sutradhar. Again, the lyricism and music of the Vaishnava theatre seem to have reappeared in the radio play and thus there is an indication that we might go back in some respects to the Sanskrit and Vaishnava drama.

It is clear that the future cannot be forged by ignoring history and tradition altogether. Perhaps, out of the tradition of the poetic drama and the folk theatre may arise a new drama which more than anything else may be symbolic of the Indian theatre. Nevertheless, in a vast and varied country like ours, it is unnecessary and undesirable to expect drama to follow a single pattern. In another sense, however, unity is appearing. Under the stimulus of freedom, a single and undivided inspiration for the revival of the Indian theatre is making itself felt all over the country, and the Hindi theatre can be the most convenient vehicle of this inspiration.

ASSAMESE DRAMA

Sabita Debi

The performance of a play is known in Assam as "Bhaona." The word "Bhaoria" means one who acts and "Bahua" is a jester. The performances by the Bhaorias which have come down from ancient times depict events and incidents of Assamese social life. The Bhaoria is a lyrical poet who composes verses extempore and these are sung on religious or social occasions either solo or in chorus with other Bhaorias.

The Dhulia performances contain elements of acting of a comic nature; they have their stock of popular jokes with which to regale the audience. Such performances usually take place to fill in the time between the acrobatics by other performers; acting is an essential item in a Dhulia performance which sparkles with wit and humour.

The oldest expression of drama in Assam is "Ojapali." The Oja is the principal participant who narrates in verse mythological stories, at the same time singing and holding a dialogue in prose with the "daina-pali", the chief among the "palis". The palis are the whole company who join in the singing and dancing. Undoubtedly, the form of this dance arose out of the *Natya Sastra*, the principles of Dramatic Art. The tales from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are portrayed in this manner, and also that of Behula and Lakhindar from the *Padma-Purana*. There is much vigour in these dances which vary from place to place. The display of the *mudras* is to be found in certain parts of Assam. The form is based on the footwork, the timing and the rhyming of the verses. The theme is the main object of Ojapali, and it is narrated with great emotion and pathos. Whether one would like to call it drama or not, at any rate, events and characters are conveyed with great dramatic effect. The Dheodhani is the mute female character in Ojapali who personates Behula and dances to please the goddess Manasa.

Subsequently, with the advent of the Vaishnava era in

Assam, themes were introduced from the *Bhagabata Purana* in Ojapali. Instead of stories from the *Padma Purana*, the *Prahlad Upakhyan*, *Kaliya Daman* and the *Ramayana* now came to the depicted through the Vaishnava Ojapali.

The importance of the Vaishnava Ojapali lies in the fact that the great saint and reformer Shri Shankardev (1449-1568 A.D.), who had cultivated the art of dance and music was the first to introduce Vaishnava themes through the Ojapali.

It is in the Vaishnava period that Assamese drama really came into its own. Shri Shankardev and his disciple, Shri Madhavdev (1489-1596 A.D.), contributed largely to Vaishnava culture through the literary work in Ankiya Natas, i.e., the one-act plays. These Natas, with their music, dance, and metre, were rich and original in their technique, which was distinct, although they were based on the Sanskrit drama. They became important vehicles for the propagation of Vaishnavism and they taught the people the story of the life of Shri Krishna, woven round his childhood and his days at Dwarka. There were one or two Ankiya Natas about Shri Ramchandra also.

Except for the subject-matter, the language, and the fact that they were one-act plays, the dramas of Shri Shankardev and Shri Madhavdev are modelled on the Sanskrit Natakas. There are different varieties of such Natas, such as the Jatra and Jhumura. The Jhumuras are short plays without the preliminary of the " Nandi," that is, the prayer song sung at the opening of a play. Some of Shri Shankardev's followers, who belong to the same school, are Shri Gopal Ata, Ramcharan Thakur, Daityary Thakur.

The characters in the dramas are called " Caritas," while the principal actors are called " Natuas." The singers are " Gayans " and the instrumentalists (khel) are " bayans." The assistants at the concert are " palis," whereas the Sutradhar acts as a link between the audience and the drama. The theatre is known as " Rabha." In some of the plays, where the demons like " Baka Sur " or " Kali Nag" appear, huge masks are used to represent them. It is said that the scenes and the curtains called " Yavanika " were sometimes painted by Shri Shankardev himself.

Though interspersed with Sanskrit words, the language of

Ankiya Nata was Brajabuli, the favourite language of Vaishnavites. The beauty of the language touched the hearts of the masses ; the words and phrases were so chosen and the actors intoned them in such a way that they expressed the spiritual content of the play beautifully.

The songs in these plays consisted of Ankiya Geets and *Bhattimas*, the former related to the drama itself, while the latter were prayer songs, sung to the accompaniment of Khol and Tals. The dances of the Ankiya Natas had the technique and form belonging to a definite school. There were the dances of the Sutradhar, of Krishna, of the young cowherds and of the female characters. There were also other dances like Chali, Natua, and Jhumura. In Ankiya Natas, before the play begins, there is chorus singing, to the accompaniment of Khol and cymbals, followed by a concert of Khols called Guru Ghat. Then the Sutradhar comes upon the stage and gives an elaborate dance, at the end of which he recites "Nandi" in Sanskrit in praise of Shri Krishna or Shri Ram. The actual play begins with the appearance of the characters on the stage, At the end of the play, comes " Mukti Mangal " and *Bhattima*, sung in praise of the Lord by the entire troupe of artists.

Thanks to the genius of Shri Shankardev, the beauty of the language and the idealism of the plays were set off by the quality of the music and dancing. The twelve dramas written by Shri Shankardev and Shri Madhavdev were: *Kaliya-Daman*, *Patni-Prasad*, *Rasa-Krida*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Sriram-Vijaya*, *Parijat-Haran*, *Arjun-Bhanjan*, *Chor-Dhara-Jhumura*, *Bhumi-Lutia*, *Pimpara Guchua*, *Bhojan Vyavahar*, and *Shri Krishna Janma*. The tradition was carried on by their followers who, equally inspired by religious fervour, propagated Vaishnavism through dramas and other forms of literature.

These plays were colourful and appealed to popular sentiment generally. The scenes were descriptive and instinct with romance and chivalry. They used to be staged in the Rabha Ghars or the houses of public gathering. The female rôles were taken by men.

This phase of the Assamese drama lasted for a long time. In those days the poets were patronised by the kings. Later, however, there was a setback owing largely to the lack of royal

patronage and the drama declined for a time.

Towards the end of the 18th century, Shri Lambodar Bora translated into Assamese the Sanskrit drama, *Sakuntala*, for production. It is difficult to say when exactly the performance took place and with what success. Women were not allowed to take part in a theatrical production in Assam till recently and there is no professional actress in Assam even now.

There had been a few good Pauranic dramas like *Brishaketu* by Shri Durga Prasad Dutta and *Banjara* by Shri Padma Nath Gohain Barua who also wrote a historical play called *Joymati*. It is a moving story from the history of the Ahoms,—the story of a woman's sacrifice for her husband, King Gadapani. It stirs the soul of the Assamese people.

Shri Lakhinath Bezbarua, who married into the Tagore family, brought about a renaissance in Assamese literature in the 19th century. He wrote many plays and introduced mirth and humour into his plays, notably in *Litikai*, and *Chikarpati Nikarpati*. Shri Hemchandra Barua wrote social dramas pointing out defects in society while Shri Ratneswar Mahanta wrote character plays like *Harishchandra Nataka*. Plays like " *Sonit Kunwari* and *Karengar Ligiri*, written by Shri Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla, were full of music and dance. The author had a natural aptitude for blending different kinds of tunes and the tunes to which he set his songs created a world of romance and beauty. Though he wrote other plays also, these two were very popular on the stage. Patriotic motives were also utilised and for their dramatic possibilities these served to make the actors popular. Such patriotic plays have come from the pen of Shri Probin Phukan, a modern Assamese dramatist. His patriotic plays have centred round the lives of such people as the distinguished Maniram Dewan and Lachit Borphukan. Two other writers, Shri Benudhar Rajkhowa and Shri Atul Hazarika, have contributed a number of plays on the social life of Assam in the villages. These plays take place against a background of beautiful rural scenes and give a true picture of the village folk.

It may be said in passing that Assam has no professional theatre yet, and dramatic activities are confined primarily to amateurs in most towns that boast of stages and halls. Some

places have more than one stage ; the dramatic clubs produce plays on special occasions with local talent. Where there is no stage, the plays are staged in specially erected pandals.

In the past, the Assamese theatre suffered much from the absence of actresses. As already mentioned, women entered the field of acting only recently and have given a good account of themselves. It is confidently hoped that, before long, Assam will mark a new beginning for Assamese drama.

BENGALI DRAMA AND STAGE

Prabodh C. Sen

India has a long and proud history of dramatic literature and stage performance. Barring Greece, perhaps no ancient country can rival India in this sphere. None the less Indian drama suffered from certain drawbacks. It was composed in Sanskrit which ceased to be spoken many centuries before Christ; and as time passed the gulf between Sanskrit and Prakrit, the spoken languages of India, became wider and wider. On the one hand, Sanskrit moved farther and farther away from the living languages of the common people and, on the other, the Prakrits made rapid progress and developed into what are known as the modern Indian Languages. Sanskrit idioms became stereotyped and could hardly be understood by any but the highly educated. Thus garbed in a dead language and removed from the life of the people, Sanskrit drama became a dead art, of interest only to scholars, and was staged only in the artificial atmosphere of royal patronage. It is true that Prakrit dramas arose out of popular demand, but lacking royal and scholarly support they could not survive.

Indian drama, Sanskrit and Prakrit, was dying a natural death, while India was gradually being subjugated by the Muslim Turks of Central Asia. With their coming and the consequent withdrawal of royal support, Sanskrit drama may be said, to all intents and purposes, to have come to an end after having had a glorious tradition of more than a thousand years. The Muslims not only had no dramatic tradition, they were averse to the histrionic art. In Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, drama is an unknown literary form. Thus, although the Muslim rulers of India were conspicuous for their love of music, painting, and architecture, they took no interest in the theatre. Even under Shah Jahan, India had no theatre.

The popular dramatic performances, which took place side by side with Sanskrit dramas in the pre-Mohammedan period, continued, however, as part of the popular festivities

during Muslim rule. Naturally, these assumed different forms in different parts of India. What form they actually took in Bengal is shrouded in mystery. Like the origins of most human arts, the origin of popular drama in Bengal remains obscure, although the indirect testimony of language seems to furnish some clue to the acted drama of Bengal. The words for 'actor' and 'play' in Sanskrit are *nata* and *nataka* respectively. These are derivatives of the root *nat*, the Prakrit or vernacular form of the Sanskrit root *nrit*, to dance. At any rate, these words suggest that Indian drama was popular in origin ; that some form of pantomime attended with dancing was its starting point; and music and dialogue were added later.

A stage in the transition from this primitive origin to drama proper seems to be represented by the *Gita-Go inda* of Jayadeva, the court poet of King Lakshmana-Sena of Bengal (twelfth century A.D.). Though written in Sanskrit, this work was fashioned, beyond doubt, after the prevalent vernacular prototypes, and it became a model and a source of inspiration for the poets of Bengal for centuries. Though poetic in form, the *Gita-Govinda* can be acted as a play with dance and music. It is the earliest specimen of a primitive type of play that survives in Bengal, and must have preceded regular drama. It has no proper dialogue, for each of the three characters merely engages in a kind of lyrical monologue to which the other two are supposed to listen. The subject is the love of Krishna for beautiful Radha, their estrangement and final reconciliation.

As already mentioned, the *Gita-Govinda* was composed under the royal patronage of Lakshmana-Sena. It was towards the end of his reign that Bengal fell victim to Turkish invasion, and then followed a period of cultural chaos which lasted for over two centuries. The cultural history of Bengal during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is but vaguely known. Consequently, the rudiments of drama found in the *Gita-Govinda* could not develop in normal fashion. Popular enthusiasm for such semi-dramatic performances, especially at religious festivals, continued to flow in a feeble stream till the end of the fifteenth century when there appeared the great Chaitanyadeva (1486-1534) from whom the cultural and spiritual life of Bengal received a great impetus. Even histrionic art bears the impress

of his many-sided personality. The biographies of Chitanyadeva written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries throw an interesting light on the dramatic and semi-dramatic performances in Bengal during his lifetime. He had a fascination for drama and was himself a highly skilled actor. Vrindavan Das (c. 1507-89), the author of *Chaitanya-Bhagavata*, has given us a very vivid and interesting description of a play named *Rukimini-haran* which was produced at the house of a certain Chandrasekhar of Navadvipa and in which Chaitanya played the role of Rukmini. To the surprise of the audience, Haridas, the Muslim follower of Chaitanyadeva, appeared in the role of the Kotwal with large whiskers, a huge turban on his head, and a big staff in his hand. Srivasa, another follower of Chaitanya, played the part of Narada and appeared with a long white flowing beard, sandal marks on his body, a *vina* resting on his shoulder and *kusa* grass in his hand. As Rukmini, the daughter of the King of Vidarbha, Chaitanya wore the garb of a damsel so exquisitely that no one recognised him. He danced beautifully to the tune of songs sung by the dramatic party. The audience was so enthralled by the performance that they were hardly aware of the passage of the night.

This dramatic performance probably took place some time in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Vrindavan Das has described the sort of drama that was popular in those days and how it was played. The fact that this particular play was staged at the house of a private person like Chandrasekhar shows that no need was felt for a recognised stage as required by ancient Sanskrit drama or by a modern vernacular play. It seems that the story of *Rukmini-haran* was played in the fashion of a *jatra* performance which is still popular in Bengal. *Jatra* resembles a drama in many ways the main points of difference being that unlike a drama *jatra* requires no fixed stage, scenes or curtain, that it abounds in dance song and music and has much less dialogue, action or plot. In fact, *jatra* may be regarded as the popular and earlier form of developed regular drama. As has already been stated, the Sanskrit words for actor, play, and dramatic art are *nata*, *nataka*, and *natya* respectively, and they are derived from the vernacular root *nat*, to dance. It may therefore be inferred that Indian drama has evolved from

some kind of a popular dance performance. Mimic dancing becomes drama as soon as words were added to it. This is borne out by *jatra*, which may be regarded as a continuation of the original and primitive *natya*, the dance play, the precursor of the acted drama.

The developed character of *jatra* in the sixteenth century leads us to think that its origin must be traced back to a much earlier age. It seems that originally *jatra* meant a religious procession accompanied by mimic dance, song and other festivities. The occasions for such festive processions were many, such as the *Dol-jatra* or the Holi festival of Srikrishna, the *Rath-jatra* or the car festival of Jagannath. The Buddhist and Jain religious festivals were also celebrated with processions. The original form of these *jatra* festivals may perhaps be guessed from the mimic shows, dances, and music that characterise well known religious processions moving along the stree s of Dacca in East Bengal on the occasion of Janmashtami or the birthday of Srikrishna or along the streets of Calcutta on similar occasions. The next stage of development was reached when these shows and dances were displayed in a fixed arena instead of a moving procession. When the dialogue was added, the fully grown *jatra* came into existence. These states must, however, have been reached long before the time of Chaitanya. We know that under his inspiration Ramananda Ray, his South Indian follower, wrote a Sanskrit drama named *Jagannath-Vallabha* which was acted in the temple of Jagannath at Puri under the direction of King Prataparudra of Orissa. The female parts were played by the *Deva-dasis* trained by the author himself. Rup Goswami, a well known Bengali disciple of Chaitanya, is credited with the authorship of at least three dramas, all in Sanskrit, namely, *Vidagdha Madhava* (1532), *Lalita-Madhava* (1537) and *Danakeli-Kaumadi* (1553). Their common theme is some aspect of Krishna's love for Radha. *Vidagdha Madhava* was first played at the holy city of Vrindavan before a host of pilgrims. This play as well as *Danakeli-Kaumadi* were rendered into Bengali by Yadunandan Das in the seventeenth century; *Lalita-Madhava* was translated into Bengali by Swarupcharan Goswami towards the end of the eighteenth century. Another Sanskrit drama, the *Chaitanya-Chandrodaya* of Paramananda

Sen Kavikarnapur, written before 1540 A.D., deserves mention. The Bengali version of this drama (1712-13) is attributed to Purushottam Misra, better known as Premdas. Finally, the Sanskrit drama, *Sangita-Madhava,* is from the pen of the great Bengali poet Govindadas Kaviraj of the sixteenth century, after Chaitanya's death.

It is evident from this brief narration that the practice of writing dramas in Sanskrit was largely inspired by Chaitanya and was in vogue in Bengal for a long period. It is also clear that such dramatic literature, in the original Sanskrit or in its Bengali version, was popular among the reading public of Bengal up to the closing years of the eighteenth century. In fact, these dramas were primarily meant to be read along with the earlier Sanskrit dramas like the *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa, the *Uttara-Rama-Charitam* of Bhavabhuti, the *Prabodha-Chandrodaya* of Krishnamisra and so on. There is little evidence to show, however, that, except on a very few occasions such as those referred to above, these dramas were actually produced for the benefit or entertainment of the public, select or general.

On the other hand, it is obvious that for centuries, *jatra*, i.e., the popular form of drama, continued without any break, to be played for popular amusement and education. It is unfortunate that it never occurred to any one to give a literary form to *jatra*. Like most other forms of folk literature, it remained unwritten. It is curious that dramas, Sanskrit and Bengali, were written, but seldom acted, while *jatras* which were acted publicly were not written down till the nineteenth century when modern drama came to exercise its influence on *jatra.*

Thus, both *jatra* and drama had a common origin in the religious festivals; but they followed distinct lines of development. With the decadence of Sanskrit and the incursions of the conquering Muslim Turks, drama and the stage ceased to attract and *jatra* without a stage or curtains held the field. Popular *jatra* actors no doubt drew the admiration of the people, but history has no record of their achievements until the eighteenth century when two brothers called Sridam and Subal became famous as great *jatra-walas* or actors and succeeded in finding a lasting place in the people's memory. They were followed by a band of *jatra* actors, such as Paramananda, Premchand, Badan

Adhikari, Govinda Adhikari, Lochan Adhikari and others, each of whom showed some originality by giving a new form to drama and acting. When at last the new drama came from the west and was hailed by the educated public, indigenous histrionic art went out of existence. But this need not be put down exclusively to the influence of western drama. *Jatra* had in the meantime lost its moral and religious tone as well as its refinement of taste.

It seems that originally *jatra* was very intimately related to the Krishna cult and its commonest theme seems to have been the *Kaliya-daman* (the subduing of the mythological serpent Kaliya) episode in the Krishna legend, so much so that in the course of time all plays connected with the Krishna legend came to be known by the name of *Kaliya-daman.* The name *Krishna-jatra* was also not unknown. Then came the *Chandi-jatra* which depicted the story of the goddess Chandi. The *Chaitanya-jatra*, which followed, bears testimony to the great hold the character of Chaitanya had on the imagination of the people. In later days, when religious and moral themes ceased to have the same influence on the public mind, the love story of Vidya and Sundar became the popular theme of jatra. The *Vidya-Sundar jatra* illustrated the depraved taste of a decadent age and heralded the end of this time-honoured folk drama of Bengal. This brings us to about the middle of the nineteenth century which coincided with the appearance of western drama in this country. But indigenous drama that fashioned the national mind for centuries could not fail to exercise its influence on the new drama. This influence is particularly noticeable in the works of the well known playwright and actor, Girischandra Ghosh (1844-1912), and can be traced even to the plays of Rabindranath Tagore. The old *jatra* tradition, too, was profoundly influenced by drama from the West.

The stage is inseparably bound up with drama. It is now an admitted fact that Indian drama had an independent origin and followed its own course of development without being affected by Greek or any other extraneous influence. One of the reasons in favour of this conclusion is that the Indian stage, which has been elaborately described in Bharata's

Natya Sastra, bore no resemblance to the Greek theatre. However, the Indian stage practically ceased to exist on the eve of the Turkish conquest of India and during the centuries that followed India was without a theatre.

It is about the middle of the eighteenth century, some years before the battle of Plassey, that the English founded at Calcutta a theatre of their own, the Play House. It was followed by others. But they did not appreciably affect the cultural life of Bengal. Towards the end of that century, a Russian named Herasim Lebedeff founded a Bengali theatre in the heart of Calcutta. Lebedeff translated an English drama, *The Disguise*, into Bengali with the help of his Bengali instructor, Golaknath Das, who helped him when it was produced at the Bengali theatre on 27th November, 1795, and again on 21st of March, 1796. The theatre was decorated in Bengali style; some indigenous features were introduced and some poems of the poet Bharatchandra Ray were set to music in order to interest the Bengali audience. The most interesting fact remains that Bengali actors of both sexes took part in the play. Unfortunately, the translation of this play was not published and the first Bengali theatre ceased to exist with Lebedeff's departure from India.

Lebedeff and his Bengali theatre did not have a lasting effect on the life of the people. For about four decades Bengal remained without a theatre of her own and had to be satisfied with the *jatra* performances which were continually being adapted to the changing tastes of succeeding generations. But in the meantime English education had brought about a radical change in the mind of the enlightened public. This resulted in the establishment in 1831 of the Hindu Theatre by Prasanna Kumar Tagore. The first two plays put on the boards were Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and Wilson's English version of Bhavabhuti's Sanskrit drama, *Uttara-Rama-Charitam*. During the next two decades many private theatres came into existence and the staging of English plays became the fashion, but a remarkable exception to this deserves special mention. In 1833, a theatre was established at the house of Nabinchandra Basu of Calcutta. Four or five Bengali plays used to be staged at this theatre every year. *Vidya-Sundar*, staged in 1835, was a

great success and was praised by thoughtful critics. In this theatre also, as in Lebedeff's Bengali theatre, the feminine roles were played by women. This must be regarded as a daring venture for the times. None of the plays staged here were printed; perhaps they were not worth printing.

It is for want of good dramatic literature, which could satisfy the sophisticated mind brought up on English plays, that a Bengali stage of the modern type took such a long time to come into being. At last, the demand for good plays led to the creation of modern dramas in 1852 when two plays were written after the English model, *Kirtivilas*, the first Bengali tragedy by Jogendrachandra Gupta, and *Bhadrarjun*, the first Bengali comedy by Taracharan Sikdar. In the next year followed *Bhanumati-Chittavilas*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, by Harachandra Ghosh. But these authors lacked genius and their works had no great influence on dramatic literature or the stage. It is no wonder that none of these plays were ever staged. Still they deserve mention for they were the forerunners of a new age that was to down in a few years.

The year 1857 marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Bengali drama and the theatre. In fact, Bengali drama and the stage have had a continuous history since that memorable year. It was in 1857 that four published dramas were staged in three different theatres. The first of these is *Abhijnana-Sakuntala* by Nandakumar Ray. It was produced in the private theatre of Asutosh Dev, a well known citizen of Calcutta. The second, *Kulina-kula-sarvasva* (1854) written by Ramnarayan Tarkaratna, is of greater importance. It is the first original Bengali drama dealing with a burning social problem of the day, the problem of Kulin polygamy; and its author is regarded as the first proper dramatist of Bengal. The next two plays, *Veni-Samhara* (1856) by Ramnarayan and *Vikramorvasi* (1857) by Kaliprasanna Sinha both translations of well known Sanskrit dramas, were staged in the private theatre of the latter who took part in both plays.

The next year, another drama of Ramnarayan, *Ratnavali*, again a Sanskrit drama rendered into Bengali, was staged in the Belgachia Theatre, which surpassed its predeces-

sors in all respects. The owners of the theatre invited many Englishmen to see the play, and for their benefit the drama was translated into English. This work was entrusted to Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who after witnessing this performance felt the want of good dramas in Bengali and himself undertook to write them. In a short time, he came out with his *Sarmishtha*, which was staged in the Belgachia theatre on 3rd September, 1859. Thus, a genius appeared and in quick succession he wrote a few plays of varied types—comedy, tragedy, and farce—which revolutionised dramatic literature as well as the histrionic art of Bengal. It seems that, for several years, the people of Calcutta were seized with the hunger for more and more plays. There was no dearth of theatres and dramatic performances and dramatists appeared to meet the ever growing demand. Of the dramatists, the most important are Dinabandhu Mitra and Manomohan Basu. Dinabandhu's first play, *Nildarpan* (1860), a tragedy depicting the inhuman oppression of Indian peasants by European indigo planters, created a sensation. Other plays by him also bear the stamp of a great dramatic genius. He was a keen observer of character and events, and particularly of people of the lower strata of society. This has brought reality to his plays which was rare in contemporary drama. Indeed, few playwrights could rival Dinabandhu in dramatic power.

Of the many plays staged in the sixties, one is reminded of *Nal-Damayanti* by Kalidas Sanyal and *Malati-Madhava* of Bhavabhuti translated by Ramnarayan. These were produced at the residence of Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore where a few more plays including farces, one of which was by Jatindra Mohan himself, were staged. In 1866, the Jorasanko Natya-Samaj produced a play, *Nava Natak*, criticising polygamy. This play was written by Ramnarayan. But it was *Navin Tapasvini* (1863), *Sadhavar Ekadasi* (1866) and other plays of Dinabandhu which must be regarded as having marked the apex of the dramatic art of this decade. Manomohan Basu also wrote a number of plays including *Ramabhishek* (1867), and *Pranay-Pariksha* (1869), which were produced and acclaimed on the stage.

It is the dramas of Dinabandhu that led to the establish-

ment in 1872 of a public theatre in Calcutta, the National Theatre. This marks the second phase in the history of the Bengali stage. It began its career with the performance of the *Nildarpan* which was regarded even at that time as an event of national importance. Other public theatres also made their appearance almost at the same time. One of these is the Bengal Theatre which opened with Madhusudan Dutt's *Sarmishtha* and where the dramatised version of Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Durgesnandini* was also staged. From the beginning (1873), feminine roles were played by women at this theatre. Two plays of Jyotirindranath Tagore (an elder brother of the Poet Tagore), *Puruvikram* (1874), and *Asrumati* (1879) were also produced here. Both of them inspired the audience with a spirit of patriotism hitherto unknown in the history of Bengal.

In the seventies, under the leadership of Girischandra Ghosh, the Great National Theatre staged a number of plays, one of which was *Sarojini* (1875) written by Jyotirindranath with patriotic themes. There was great rivalry between the Bengal and the Great National Theatres and the latter even undertook a tour in the North and West of India and produced with great success Bengali plays like *Nildarpan* in Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and Lucknow.

These public theatres became the nursery of professional actors, thus helping the development of histrionic art. Great artists began to appear on the stage. Among these the first great name is Girischandra Ghosh and the latest Sisirkumar Bhaduri. There were others only less important including Ardhendu Mustaphi, Amritalal Basu, Apares Mukherji, Dani Ghosh, Amarendra Datta, Tinkari Chakravarti, Nirmalendu Lahiri, Durgadas Banerji, and Ahindra Chaudhuri, while among the names of the actresses, Charusila, Krishnabhamini, Niharbala, Tarasundari, and Prabha may be mentioned. Thanks to them the stage has undergone a revolutionary change.

The unceasing demand of the public stage has been responsible for a large number of plays. Unfortunately, not many of them are great, for the bulk of them have grown out of the necessity to satisfy public taste which has not always been high. Girischandra Ghosh himself was compelled to

write a great number of plays, most of them to serve the needs of the stage ; some were written to instil religious fervour into people's hearts; but only a few are of real merit and can be expected to find a place of honour in the history of Bengal's dramatic literature.

Another actor playwright of this time was Amritalal Basu (1853-1929) who was a prolific writer. He is particularly known for his *Vivaha-vibhrat* (1884) and other highly enjoyable satirical plays which gave a new tone and interest to the stage.

The next name that deserves mention is that of Dwijendra Lal Ray (1863-1913) who infused a new strength and character into the dramatic literature of Bengal and captured the imagination of lovers of drama. It may be observed that the model he set is still being followed by other playwrights. His historical plays, imbued with a spirit of patriotism, are popular not only in Bengal, but even in the Hindi-speaking areas, of course, through translation. His plays, particularly his stage directions, have served to remodel and to give a realistic character to Bengali acting which used to be overdone in the old days. Even then he also had his idiosyncrasies which, though popular at one time, do not find favour with the public now. The name of another playwright, Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod (1864-1927), should be mentioned here. His historical plays, particularly his *Alamgir* (1921), became very popular. Sisirkumar Bhaduri's acting in the role of Alamgir left a mark in the history of the dramatic art of Bengal and greatly contributed to its popularity.

There were also other writers who wrote original plays for the stage. Though not possessing much literary value, they helped the theatre to commercial success. One recalls in this connection the activities of the Art Theatre which started in 1923 with Apares Mukherji as director, himself a veteran actor and playwright. It began by staging his *Karnarjun* with Ahindra Chaudhuri in the role of Arjuna with phenomenal success. Tagore's *Chirakumar-Sabha* and *Grihaprabes*, Apares Mukherji's *Iraner Rani*, and a number of other plays including Rabindra Moitra's *Manamayee Girls' School* were successfully staged there.

Sisirkumar Bhaduri, the most distinguished actor of present-day Bengal, made his mark in the twenties and played

the hero's role in *Sita*, *Shorasi*, *Seshraksha*, *Alamgir*, and a number of other plays, and drew full houses. Dani Ghosh, the talented son of Girischandra Ghosh, who had played the principal role in a number of plays written by his illustrious father and been the idol of playgoers, before Sisir Bhaduri came on the scene, joined the latter at Natyaniketan.

Rabindranath Tagore's dramas are a class by themselves with distinct phases of development which require more elaborate treatment. The Tagore family took a great interest in and did much to encourage drama and the stage since the days of Madhusudan and Ramnarayan. Many of its members were gifted actors and under their fostering care the stage followed a distinct course of development. Jyotirindranath, Tagore's elder brother, whom we have already mentioned, was not only a successful actor but also a playwright, occupying a place among the very best in Bengal. It was particularly his encouragement that initiated Rabindranath into the art of the stage and led him to write plays from an early age. Even before he wrote any of his own, Tagore appeared in the role of the principal actor in a play by Jyotirindranath when he was only sixteen years of age (1877), and at once established his reputation as an actor. Of his numerous dramas, the first, *Valmiki-Pratibha*, was published in 1881. When it was staged publicly he took the part of Valmiki, the name part in the play. *Valmiki-Pratibha* is an opera without any spoken dialogue. His last dramatic work, *Syāma* (1939) is a dance drama. Between these two, he wrote more than three dozen dramas of extremely varied forms and types —comedy, tragedy, farce, symbolic play etc.—which have no parallel in Bengali literature. He also introduced new techniques of acting from time to time and it is not surprising that they were greatly transformed at his hand. Being an adept himself, he trained bands of actors who carried his ideas to different parts of the country. And it was not long before the public theatre, too, adopted some of his innovations. But it should be remembered that neither the stage nor the theatre public could keep pace with Tagore's technique or his dramatic ideas. Hence, although on many occasions his plays have been produced on the public stage with great success, they are enjoyed only by a few and have no

great appeal for the general public.

The great artists, Abanindranath (Tagore's nephew) and his disciple, Nandalal Basu, should be mentioned in this connection. For it is they who helped the great poet in giving the stage and the theatrical costumes that simplicity of beauty and taste which is so much admired now-a-days.

Besides the professional stage, there are at present innumerable amateur clubs and associations which have also shown great histrionic ability. One of them is the *Bohurupee* group which has earned popularity both in Calcutta and outside, particularly in their production of social plays like Tulsi Lahiri's *Chenra Tar.*

Before we conclude, we must mention another name who was thrown up by the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal in 1905. It is Mukunda Das, a *Jatra-wala* who was more than a *Jatra-wala.* A great social reformer and revolutionary, he himself wrote the *palas* he produced and toured the countryside seeking, through them, to rejuvenate the old, moribund, society and to inspire the youth of the country to high patriotic duties. The verve and virility of his *palas* and the massiveness of his acting created history in East Bengal countryside in those days.

In passing, it must be admitted that, in spite of its possessing a band of good playwrights, such as Manmatha Roy, Sachindranath Sen Gupta, Vidhayak Bhattacharya and others, who are constantly writing new plays, in spite of the fact that there are able actors like Sisirkumar Bhaduri, Ahindra Chaudhuri and others, and in spite of the new stage amenities, it looks as if after a glorious career of nearly a century, the Bengali theatre has fallen on evil days. One drawback is that the theatre has often to fall back either on old plays or on the dramatised version of Bengali novels, past and present. It must be remembered that neither Bankimchandra nor Saratchandra Chatterji, the two great novelists of Bengal, wrote dramas, but the dramatised versions of their novels have always been very popular on the stage. Saratchandra himself dramatised his novel, *Dena Paona* and called it *Shorasi,* which when produced on the stage, drew full houses. His *Binder Chhele,* a dramatised version of his novel of the same name was also a great success on the stage. Few novelists have

written plays originally, Banaphul being an exception whose *Sri Madhusudan* has been acclaimed on the stage.

Anyhow, it must be mentioned that there is no dramatist of the calibre of Dinabandhu Mitra, Girischandra Ghosh or even of Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod to feed the stage now. Add to this the allurements of the cinema which have diverted the Bengali mind, as elsewhere, from the theatre. Lately, however, there are hopeful signs on the horizon; there are indications that the keen interest shown in the theatre by the Bengali public for nearly a century is undergoing a revival. Two plays, *Syamali* by Nirupama Devi and *Ulka* by Nihar Ranjan Gupta, have run for nearly 500 nights (1954-56) in Calcutta. Mr. Tarasankar Banerji's novel, the *Arogya-Niketan*, which has won the Sahitya Akademi prize in Delhi as well as the Rabindra Memorial Prize of the West Bengal Government, has been dramatised by the author and put on the stage at *Visva-rupa* (formerly *Srirangam*) for some months now ; it also promises to be a great success.

To conclude, it may be claimed to the credit of Bengal that Calcutta still maintains four permanent professional theatres, each of which gives a number of shows every week, and more than one show on Sunday and other public holidays, a rare phenomenon in India, and thus tries valiantly to uphold the great traditions of the Bengali stage. Besides, of late the West Bengal Government have imparted a new impetus to Bengali drama and stage by instituting periodical prizes on a competitive basis to amateur theatrical parties, not a few in number, all over the State. All these augur well for a bright future for the histrionic art which is about to complete its first century of life in Bengal.

GUJARATI DRAMA

D. G. Vyas

In the context of stage performance, the birth of Gujarati drama can be traced back to Bombay in 1852. Its history of over a hundred years provides interesting events and episodes.

The term Gujarati drama has a wider connotation which includes the pioneering work done by the Parsis and the subsequent phases of the growth and decline of the stage. As an institution, a proper perspective can be had only through an objective description. Any attempt to review drama or stage technique critically is likely to lead to biassed judgment.

Gujarat was well acquainted with drama over a century ago. Plays were written by some and a few of them were brought on to the stage. This activity was intensified as drama began to take concrete shape. Gujarat has also a folk form of dramatic representation in Bhavai. It has its own heritage of history and legend and traditions of music, dance and art. Gujarat thus offered fertile soil for the growth of the stage.

The initiation of any movement needs a congenial environment, and Bombay provided it for drama even in those early days. In starting the theatre movement the initiative was taken by its Parsi residents. In fact, Bombay has always remained the principal focus of Gujarati drama, being the permanent seat of the leading Natak Mandalis and the sphere of work of the dramatists and actors who were counted among the front rank artists.

At the outset, the movement was an amateur activity. Actors, dramatists and others associated with it had their own daily duties, but they met in the evening for drama. What appears to have been a part-time activity to them must have been, in reality, one of their principal concerns.

Several among these actors, playwrights and others who had lent their moral and material support to them were well educated people. Some of them were prominent people in their respective spheres. One of these was great Dadabhai

Navroji, the father of the Indian Home Rule Movement. He was a member of the advisory committee of the very first dramatic club.

Although the Parsis had played a predominant part in the establishment of the Gujarati stage, the movement was cosmopolitan in character, as some leading enlightened Hindus—Gujaratis as well as Maharashtrians—had offered their active support to it. The foremost among them were Vinayak Jagannath Shankersett, Diwan Bahadur Ranchhodbhai Udayaram, Mangaldas Nathubhai, Mansukhram Tripathi and Dr. Bhau Daji, who was a member of the advisory committee for the first club.

The first dramatic club, which was founded in 1852, was designated, the Parsi Natak Mandali. It was active for about fifteen years. Within a decade, however, about twenty others had sprung into existence but only a few had the strength to survive for any length of time.

Certain names stand out in high relief whenever the establishment and development of the Gujarati stage is discussed. Kaikhashru Navroji Kabraji was a noted dramatist, poet and musician whose opinions always carried weight with the intelligentsia. He had composed and directed dramas and was actively concerned with the formation of important dramatic units. His *Baijan Manijeh*, the earliest drama, was staged by the Victoria Natak Mandali in 1869. Coonvarji Sorabji Nazir was an equally eminent stage personality, devoted to drama throughout his life. Diwan Bahadur Ranchhodbhai Udayaram was a renowned scholar and dramatist. Dadabhai Sorabji Patel, who died early at the age of 31, Dadabhai Ratanji Thuthi, Hirji Khambhatta and Nusservanji Apakhatyar were artists and directors of eminence.

In course of time, the amateur stage had to give way to regular repertory companies. The Elphinstone Dramatic Club, which was founded in 1860-61 by C.S. Nazir in co-operation with Hirji Khambhatta and others, was an amateur organisation of some of the alumni of Elphinstone College, and it retained its individuality as such for some time. From it had sprung the Elphinstone Natak Mandali under the leadership of Nazir. Eventually, it passed into the hands of Jamshedji

Madan of the Madan Theatres Limited of Calcutta.

The Victoria Natak Mandali, with Kabraji as Secretary and Vinayak Jagannath Shankersett as the President of the working committee, was founded in 1867-68. Subsequently it came to be kown as Balliwala's Natak Mandali, because he had finally become its sole proprietor.

The Alfred Natak Mandali with which was associated the well known artist, Cowasji Palanji Khatao, was founded in 1871. In spite of frequent interruptions in its career, it had a long life and its name ceased to be heard only a few years ago. The second Parsi Natak Mandali, which had among its partners Framji Dadabhai Appu and his brother Dinshaji, and which is believed to have been founded before 1881, lived only for a few years.

The Zoroastrian Natak Mandali, which was formed before 1858, the Parsi Empress Victoria Theatrical Company Limited of Jehangir Khambhatta, the Original Victoria Club of Dadabhai Patel, the Parsi Ripon Theatrical Company of Meherji Surveyor and the Mumbai Natak Mandali of Dadabhai Thuthi were among the others which had made a significant contribution to the development of the stage. The Natak Uttejak Mandali was set up in 1874-75 for a specific purpose which will be discussed in the proper place. The Elphinstone, Victoria, Alfred, and Parsi Mandalis were the principal organisations and all of them had Gujarati dramas in their repertoires. The tradition of the stage was carried on for some time by the dramatic units of the Madan Theatres Limited after the others had closed down.

In the early days, there were very few theatres in Bombay. The first theatre built by Vinayak Jagannath Shankersett in the Grant Road locality proved to be a blessing to the various dramatic clubs. It was followed by the Victoria Theatre in the same locality. Following the construction of other theatres, the Grant Road area came to be known as the "Play House." Likewise, theatres were constructed in the Fort area, and gradually the theatre movement spread to several towns in Gujarat.

The period between 1860 and 1885 was marked by brisk dramatic activity which was confined not only to Gujarat but

extended to other parts of India. It gave an impetus to dramatists to keep the stage supplied with a series of plays. The foremost among these were Kabraji Nanabhai Rustomji Ranina, Edulji Khorey, Ranchhodji Udayaram, Dadabhai Ponchkhanawalla (Bandekhuda), the poet Narmadashankar, Khurshidji B. Framroz, Bomanji Kabraji, Shankar Bapuji Trilokekar, Nusservanji Khansaheb (Aram) and Jehangir Khambhatta.

The actors came chiefly from the Parsi community. Only a few can be mentioned out of a host of names, such as Dadabhai Thuthi, Nusservanji Forbes, Khurshidji Balliwala, Dadabhai Patel, Dr. N.N. Parekh, Lt.-Col. Dhanjisha Parekh, Cowasji Palanji Khatao, the Madan brothers— Pestonji, Jamshedji and Nusservanji, Jehangir Khambhatta, Dossabhai Mugol, Sorabji Ogra, Sorabji Katrak, and Ratansha Sinnor. The Parsi actors still retain their place on the Gujarati stage.

As the years passed, the stage life attracted others also. The Brahmins of Saurashtra produced a number of playwrights, actors and directors and the repertory companies in Bombay and Gujarat drew actors from among the Nayaks, Bhojaks Gandharvas, Meers and Marwaris, who are known for their musical skill and stage arts, as well as from other communities. To the Nayak—Bhojak community, in particular, acting and music are hereditary professions, and numerous actors belong to this community. A few came also from Maharashtra and other parts of India.

For a long time, the language of the dramas presented by the Parsis remained Gujarati as spoken by them. English was also used at times. Elphinstone Dramatic Club, for example, produced mostly English plays by Shakespeare and others.

However, a time came when the repertory companies, whose mainstay was Gujarati, turned to Urdu and ultimately a rich and varied repertoire of Urdu plays was built up by them collectively and popularised in the whole of India and outside. The leading companies are known to have undertaken tours in several towns. Balliwala had taken his troupe to Burma and to England. It may be noted that *Sonana Moolni Khorshed* was the first Urdu play written originally in Gujarati by Edulji Khorey, then rendered into Urdu and staged in 1871.

Shakespeare was a great favourite. Some of his plays were produced first in the original and then in Urdu. His plays lent colour to some dramas which were typically Gujarati. *Shahnama, the Arabian Nights* and the social life of the period were other sources from which the early Parsi playwrights drew themes for their plays.

Gujarati playwrights including a few Parsis, of course, covered a much wider field which is an index of the progress made by Gujarati drama. It has drawn freely upon the epics —the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, mythology, Sanskrit classics like *Sakuntala*, historical episodes and legends. Some of the writers have taken to social drama which in the past few years proved to be very popular.

In course of time, the need was felt for plays which could be called typically Gujarati. *Karan Ghelo*, a historical drama was already presented by Nazir. *Harishchandra* and *Nala Damayanti* of Ranchhodbhai Udayaram were produced by another group.

The demand for Gujarati dramas led to the formation of a group: the Natak Uttejak Mandali in 1874-75. Sir Mangal Das, Kabraji, and Mansukhram Tripathi were the president, secretary, and member respectively of its committee. Ranchhodbhai's *Harishchandra* was again put on the boards by this Mandali and it had a record run of 100 nights. His *Nala Damayanti* proved to be a great success. Narmadashankar's *Draupadi Darshan, Seetaharan, Sar Sakuntala* and *Balkrishna Vijay* too were staged by the same Mandali whose repertoire was supplemented by the dramas of Kabraji and Trilokekar.

Then some Gujarati Hindus came forward to form a dramatic club of their own and they received full co-operation from Ranchhodbhai. This club was formed in 1878 and was named the Gujarati Natak Mandali; and from it emerged in 1885 Bombay's famous dramatic institution—the Mumbai Gujarati Natak Mandali. Dayashankar Vasanji, who was already known as a talented stage artist, became its director and one of the partners. About 1885, the Natak Uttejak Mandali seems to have reached the end of its tether.

And then came the turning point. The drama movement seemed to have passed through a process of bifurcation. The

leading Mandalis of the Parsis developed a preference for Urdu, while Gujarati drama took its place firmly on the stage. It is difficult to draw rigid line of demarcation between the two dramatic groups, since the two overlapped to some extent.

While Gujarati drama was taking definite shape in Bombay, Gujarat too began to organise repertory companies on the model in v gue. The Morbi Arya Subodh Natak Mandali was founded in about 1878 by the well known playwright Waghji Asharam in co-operation with his brother Moolji Asharam who was both an actor and director. Waghji Asharam's *Trivikram* is said to have had a run of five years at a stretch, and then *Chandrahas* earned for his Mandali a lasting reputation.

The Mumbai Natak Mandali, as already pointed out, came into existence in 1885 in Bombay; and then in 1889 Dahyabhai Dholshaji Jhaveri, who was a dramatist, scholar, and poet, appeared on the scene and founded in Ahmedabad his Deshi Natak Samaj which happens today to be the only survival of the glory that was the Gujarati stage. The Morbi, Mumbai, Gujarati and Deshi were counted among the major institutions of Gujarati drama for a long time, visiting at times the different towns of Gujarat.

In Saurashtra also the theatre movement had taken deep roots. Between 1889 and 1906 the Vankaner Arya Hitvarddhak Natak Mandali, the Vankaner Vidya Varddhak Natak Mandali, and the Palitana Bhakti Pradarshak Natak Mandali were founded, and the tradition of Gujarati drama was thus carried on by them for many years.

The decade beginning with 1912 was a period of interse stage activity, as a few important Mandalis were formed in this period. The Arya Niti Darshak Natak Samaj, Arya Natya Samaj, Arya Naitik Natak Samaj, Vidya Vinod Natak Samaj, Saraswati Natak Samaj and Laxmikant Natak Samaj, for instance, have, each of them, left behind a creditable record of service to the Gujarati stage.

Bombay was able to support about twelve repertory companies at a time, among which probably four or five were Gujarati. The activities of the Laxmikant Natak Samaj were mostly confined to Bombay. The Arya Naitik Natak Samaj, under the able direction of its proprietor, Nakubhai Kalubhai

Shah, to whom drama was a life-long interest, belonged to Bombay. The Royal Natak Mandali and the Parsi Imperial Theatrical Company, too, had the stature of major organisations. There were besides, numerous smaller Mandalis, which had sprung up all over Gujarat at varying intervals, and dramatic activity was thus carried even to district towns.

Gujarat had produced some eminent actors besides the Parsis to whom a reference has already been made. Amrit Keshav Nayak, whose field of activity was Urdu drama, died young at the age of 31. He was a versatile actor and a capable director and had raised the standard of acting and stage technique which still bears the impress of his genius. His younger brother, Vallabh Nayak, and Master Mohan earned the reputation of front rank artistes.

Bapulal Nayak was an actor and director of great ability. Mohanlal Lalaji was born an all round actor. Jayashankar (Sundari) is still active, though he has retired from the stage. He is known as Sundari because of the heroine's role played by him years ago in *Saubhagya Sundari*. In the feminine role Jayashankar's refined acting was an ideal of grace and beauty.

The valuable contributions made by playwrights like Ranchhodbhai and Narmadashankar to Gujarati drama have been noted. Waghji Asharam, Dahyabhai Dholshaji, Nathuram Sundarji and Moolshankar Mulani are regarded as veterans of the early days. The Gujarati stage, however, owes much of its individua'ity and richness to a few junior playwrights also. Among others who lent their support to the stage were Dolatram Kriparam Pandya, Manilal Nabhubhai Dwivedi and Manishankar Ratanji Bhatt (Kant). Among the old veterans, Moolshankar Mulani is still alive. He is nearly 90 and his record of service is outstanding.

The other group of playwrights who have left their mark on Gujarati drama include Chhotalal Rukhdev Sharma, Fulchand Jhaverchand Shah, Harihar Diwana, Vijayshankar Kalidas, Narayan Visanji Thakkar, Nrisinh Vibhakar, and Maharani Shankar Sharma. Vibhakar tried to give a new turn to the stage by introducing contemporary problems in his plays. Jaman died recently and was known as a revolutionary writer for his courage to discuss controversial social problems

in some of his plays.

Gaurishankar Vairati, Shayada, Parmanand Trapajkar Gajendrashankar Pandya and Lalshankar Mehta are playwrights of established reputation. Shayada, popularly known as "Gazal Samrat," made his mark as a talented playwright at the early age of twenty-five with his successful play, *Sansar Nauka.*

Manilal Tribhuvandas (Pagal) is a prolific and powerful writer. He has over a hundred plays to his name and they deal mainly with social problems. *Ra Mandlik*, *Sansar Leela*, *Hansakumari* and *Manorama* are among his best plays. Manilal is the only Gujarati who has written drama in original Hindi and for some Marathi Mandalis.

Rasakavi Raghunath Brahmabhatt has always been in the forefront of dramatic activity. He was hardly seventeen when he made his debut with *Buddhadeva* and became famous overnight. His subsequent dramas, *Shringi Rishi* and *Suryakumari*, brought additional laurels to him. Raghunath is also a poet and is popularly known as Rasakavi. He writes songs even for plays written by others.

Prabhulal Dwivedi is a highly experienced, progressive, and successful dramatist. Today he is looked upon as the main force behind the stage. He has continued to write a regular succession of plays. His *Arunodaya* gave a commendable turn to the stage tradition in 1921 and ran over 400 nights since it was put on the boards in 1938. The Gujarati stage has derived from this drama the strength it needed to hold its own in face of adverse circumstances.

Kanaiyalal Munshi, the present Governor of Uttar Pradesh, is known as a great scholar and writer, but he is also an able dramatist. He has written several original, historical, mythological, and social plays which are a noteworthy contribution to Gujarati drama. Munshiji has tried to set a higher standard of literary art in these plays. He has laid considerable emphasis on stage technique and production and has thus given stimulus to dramatic activity of Gujarat.

Prafulla Desai belongs to the younger generation of playwrights. His *Sarvodaya* was an outstanding success and ran over 250 nights. *Suvarnayuga* is his latest play to be produced. Both these plays have been exempted from the entertainment

tax by the Government of Bombay. Pragji Dossa is another promising dramatist. Although a businessman, he is interested in literature, drama, and music and has written original plays.

Chandravadan Mehta is a staunch devotee of drama and has given many original plays to Gujarat. He is also an able actor and director with progressive ideas on stage technique. When the Gujarati stage was faced with a crisis, Chandravadan took up the challenge of the times. He staged and directed plays and himself acted in some of them. Thanks to his efforts the amateur stage is firmly established.

Prominent among the amateur groups are the Indian National Theatre, Kalakendra of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and Rangbhoomi of Bombay, Nat Mandal and Rang Mandal of Ahmedabad and Nadiad Kala Mandir of Nadiad. Nat Mandal has the benefit of Jayashankar's co-operation as its director and of the association of Dina Gandhi who is an accomplished artiste, and of Pransukh Nayak, an able and experienced actor.

Gujarati drama has naturally its own characteristics in regard to form, content, and style. The traditional stage has followed its own technique of presentation and scenic arrangement. The new groups have designed the stage according to modern requirements. The Gujarati stage still continues to treat songs as an integral part of drama. Certain new groups prefer prose dramas. Hitherto feminine roles were assigned to men, which tradition still continues but in recent years a beginning has been made with actresses in the feminine parts.

The Gujarati stage has a glorious tradition but is at present in a parlous condition. The revival of drama has been undertaken by new dramatic groups and the solitary repertory company —the Deshi Natak Samaj—which was founded 75 years ago. The Government of Bombay's scheme to encourage dramatic art has created enthusiasm about the future of drama in Gujarat and has brought the much needed patronage to the various units now in the field.

THE KANNADA STAGE

Adya Rangacharya

Drama in Karnatak has been essentially a popular art. Kannada literature, from as early as the beginning of the Christian era, has been influenced by Sanskrit. But it is only at the end of the sixteenth century that the first known Kannada drama was written. Even this drama by a certain Singararya was no more than an adaptation of the Sanskrit play *Ratnavali* by Sri Harsha of the 7th century A.D. The play is called *Mitravinda-Govinda.* It may be wrong to conclude from this that Kannada drama originated as late as the sixteenth century. It is possible that an indigenous stage did exist in Karnatak and that Sanskrit drama could not wholly supplant it. The right explanation seems to be that drama was a popular art and it was so firmly established that the educated and the intellectual, influenced by Sanskrit, could make no contribution to the traditional Kannada drama of the people.

A great deal of research will be necessary to collect evidence that drama was deep rooted in the tradition of the Kannada people, but that it was so is obvious from the variety and the long established tradition of rural drama in different regions of the Kannada-speaking area. There is Yaksagana prevalent in Kanara, there is the Doddata or Bayalata in the districts of the plain and there are other forms of entertainment in other regions. What is interesting is the fact that in all stage shows both music and dancing had a place and, as a rule, music was played not so much by the characters as by the Himmela (group behind) or by the Bhagavata. Almost all these plays, strangely enough, dealt with stories taken from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the Vedic mythology. At the same time there were plays which dealt simply with the stories of local heroes. Perhaps, the latter were the original indigenous plays while the former were smuggled after the Sanskrit epics had been popularised by Kannada poets who translated them. The dramatic entertainment, however, belonged essentially to

the villagers. Plays were written, rehearsed, played, and produced by the villagers themselves. In the course of the year, dramatic performances came to be given on fixed occasions both as a matter of duty and purely for public entertainment.

Of course, in the absence of research we would not be justified in elaborating the foregoing theme. It is true that one comes across a written Kannada play for the first time at the end of the sixteenth century. From the earliest times, Kannada literature abounds only in poetical works. These have been, and are being, studied from different angles. From the point of view of Kannada drama, these poetical works provide significant evidence. Poetical works, particularly in Satpadi, contain much material for stage production. Only a few years ago a modern Kannada writer and scholar made a stage version of a Kavya of the 10th century A.D. With only a few minor changes it was possible to produce the entire poem as a play. The study of poetical works may reveal convincingly that drama has been a continuous tradition with the Kannada people.

This traditional stage was both simple and impressive. As a rule, a temporary raised platform was provided for the performance. Usually, the village stage had no curtains. In mythological plays characters were elaborately made up according to their status and their exits and entrances were made by getting on or off the raised platform. Important female characters were disclosed by removing a temporary screen put up by members of the singing party. Certain gods or demons made their "entry" ceremoniously from a distance of a furlong or more from the stage, often walking through the audience.

We are not sure when the roll-up curtains first made their appearance on the Indian stage. Until forty or fifty years ago they were not used in village plays, although in towns and cities they were. These curtains are associated with productions to punctuate scenes and acts. Neither in old Sanskrit dramas nor in village plays was this the practice as the performance was continuous. Apparently, western influence is responsible for the introduction of curtains since they first appeared in towns and cities.

At the end of the last century, there took place a significant development in the history of the Indian stage generally. In our tradition, and in Karnatak particularly there were no professional troupes. In early Sanskrit literature we come across professional artists or actors (भरत, शैलूष) but we rarely come across an organised troupe maintaining itself on the earnings of dramatic performances. At the close of the last century and mainly through the patronage of wealthy patrons or Rajas, dramatic troupes made their appearance. For obvious reasons, these troupes visited towns and cities and rarely (either for a big festival or during the "off-season" interval) came to rural areas. Nevertheless, these professional productions did influence village plays. Many things, from the harmonium to the front curtain, were borrowed from the professional stage. There was no question of any significant influence since in production the professional stage had nothing better to show than the traditional one.

At the same time, a silent revolution was taking place in another direction. With the spread of English education, English plays had attracted a number of educated Indians. In many cases, this appreciation could lead to nothing more than translations of the plays of Shakespeare in Kannada, although these plays could not be staged. Nevertheless, it marked a step forward since it helped in evolving a new style of writing plays. The Kannada stage was fortunate indeed that at this time Kannada writers were encouraged to translate plays from Sanskrit under the patronage of the Maharaja of Mysore. Thus Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* and Sri Harsha's *Ratnavali* were translated, but to stage these translated versions was beyond the capacity of the troupes. This difficulty was solved in two different ways in different parts of Karnatak. In Mysore, a band of educated youngsters formed an amateur society, known as the Amateur Dramatic Association (A.D.A.) of Bangalore, which long served the higher interests of the modern Kannada stage. But in Dharwar (Bombay Karnatak), on the other hand, Turmari Sheshgiri Rao translated *Sakuntala* and in addition composed songs (as footnotes to verses) so that a dramatic troupe could produce the play on the stage. (This was the play which greatly influenced the late Annasaheb

Kirloskar, the father of the Marathi stage, and inspired him to try it in Marathi). From the close of the last century, plays of this type, written for professional troupes, occupied the Kannada stage.

Mention must be made here of those heroic souls who, through professional dramatic activities, kept the Kannada stage alive. In Mysore, Varadachar was a name to conjure with. Outside Mysore, dramatic companies like the Konnur Company, the Dattartreya Natak Mandali and the Vishwagunadarsha Sangeeta Natak Mandali kept the torch burning. For almost a quarter of a century these names ruled the Kannada stage. But, unfortunately, the troupes catering for the general public made little of the dramas and dramatists of those days. As a consequence, while a number of good translations of classical Sanskrit plays and of plays in English were available, the Kannada stage showed no improvement. On the other hand, with the arrival of films, the professional stage underwent a further deterioration by trying to compete with the cinema.

One professional troupe, however, succeeded in spite of ups and downs, in maintaining itself. Mythological stories and spectacular productions have helped Shri Gubbi Veeranna's theatrical company in keeping the Kannada stage alive.

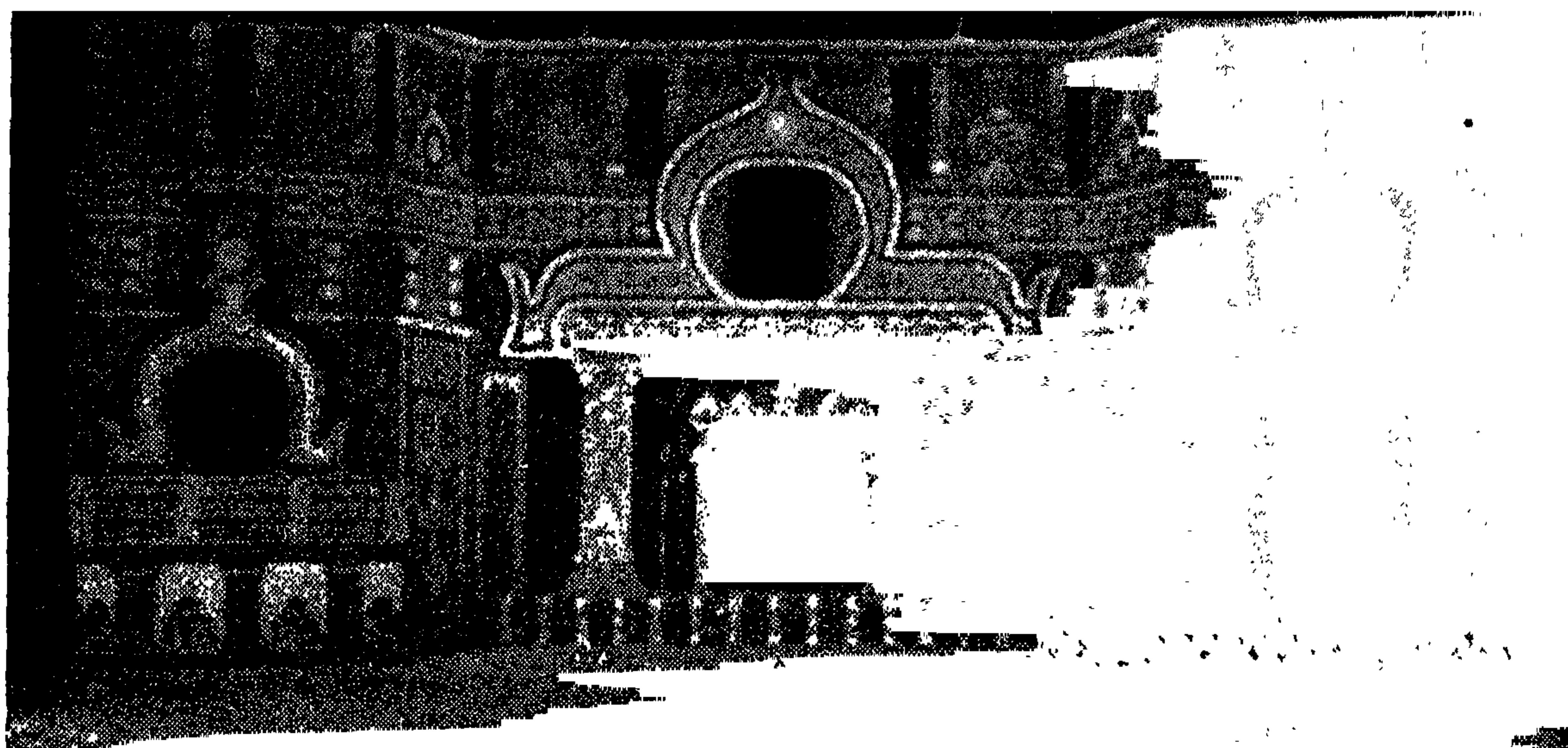
By the end of the first quarter of this century, there remained nothing of the Kannada stage. Of course, there were a number of professional troupes and a few promising artists and actors, but what was being shown was either poor translations or badly linked scenes taken from Marathi plays. The wheel of fortune came full circle; in the middle of the 19th century the modern Marathi stage came into existence on the model of Kannada plays and by 1920 the Kannada stage was nothing but an echo of the Marathi theatre.

This was not a period of amateur activities, though sporadic efforts were being made from time to time. In Dharwar, in the early years of this century, a band of educated young people had formed a troupe with the imposing title of Bharata-Kalottejaka Mandali. Apparently, the 'Kala' of these 'Bharatas' received no 'uttejana'. This troupe gave a number of good performances in different towns of Karnatak and, per-



STAGE OF THE DANCE DRAMA HALL, TEMPLE OF HARIPAD, 18TH CENTURY

STAGE SETTING FOR *Amrapalli*, A STORY OF ANCIENT INDIA, PRODUCED BY INDIAN NATIONAL THEATRES





A SCENE FROM THE SANSKRIT PLAY, *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*

A SCENE FROM THE PLAY, *Svapna Vasavadatta*





A SCENE FROM THE HINDI PLAY, *Kutte Ki Maut*

A SCENE FROM THE HINDI PLAY, *Yeh Delhi Hai*





A SCENE FROM THE ASSAMESE PLAY, *Sonit Kunwari*

ANOTHER SCENE FROM *Sonit Kunwari*

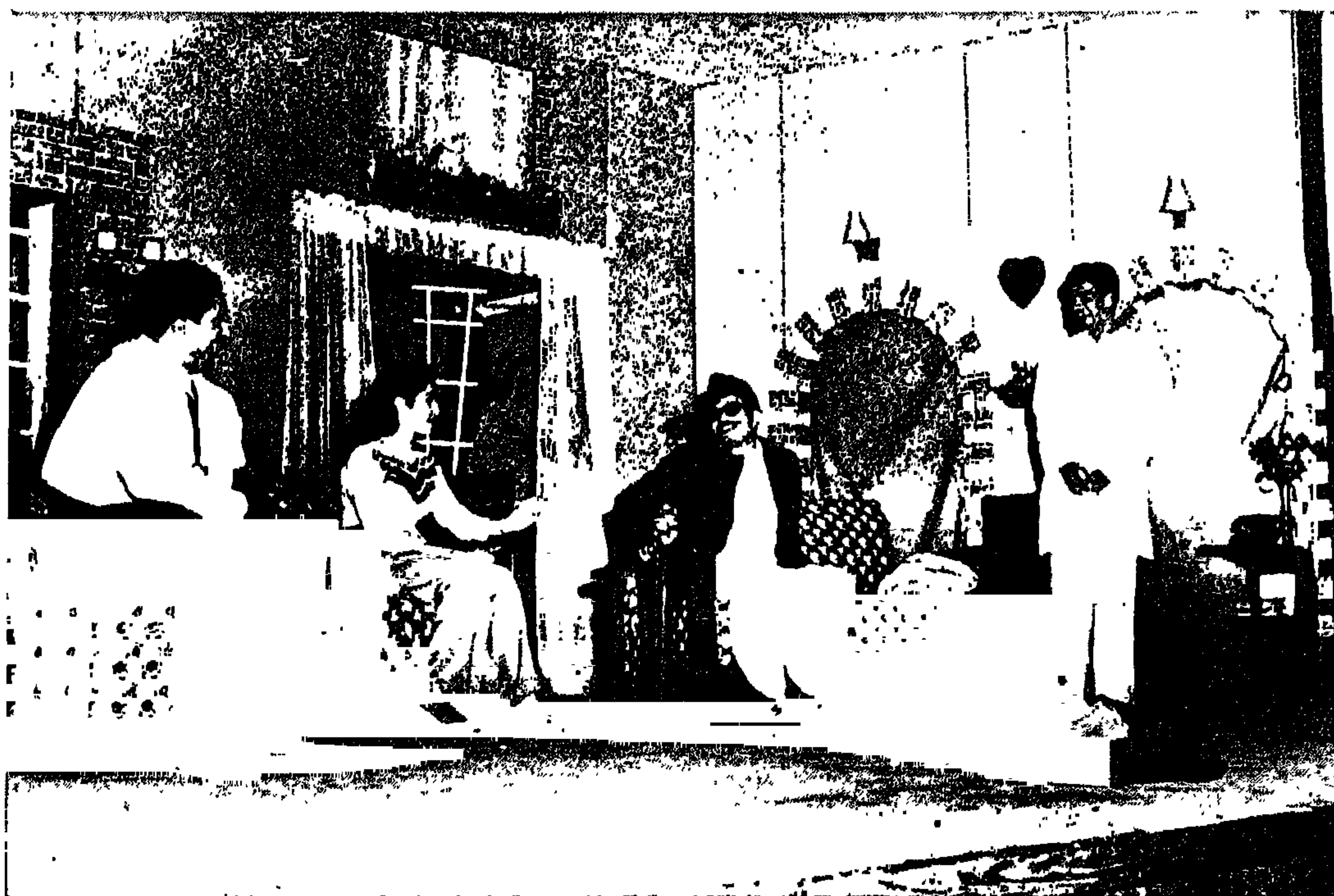




A SCENE (REPRODUCTION FROM WOODCUT) FROM TAGORE'S PLAY, *Chitrangada*



A SCENE FROM THE BENGALI PLAY, *Chenra Tar*.



A SCENE FROM THE GUJARATI PLAY, *Mazam Raat*

ANOTHER SCENE FROM *Mazam Raat*





A SCENE FROM A YAKSHAGANA DANCE DRAMA IN KANNADA

A SCENE FROM A KANNADA PLAY





A SCENE FROM A KASHMIRI PLAY

A SCENE FROM A KASHMIRI FOLK PLAY (*Bhand Jashn*)

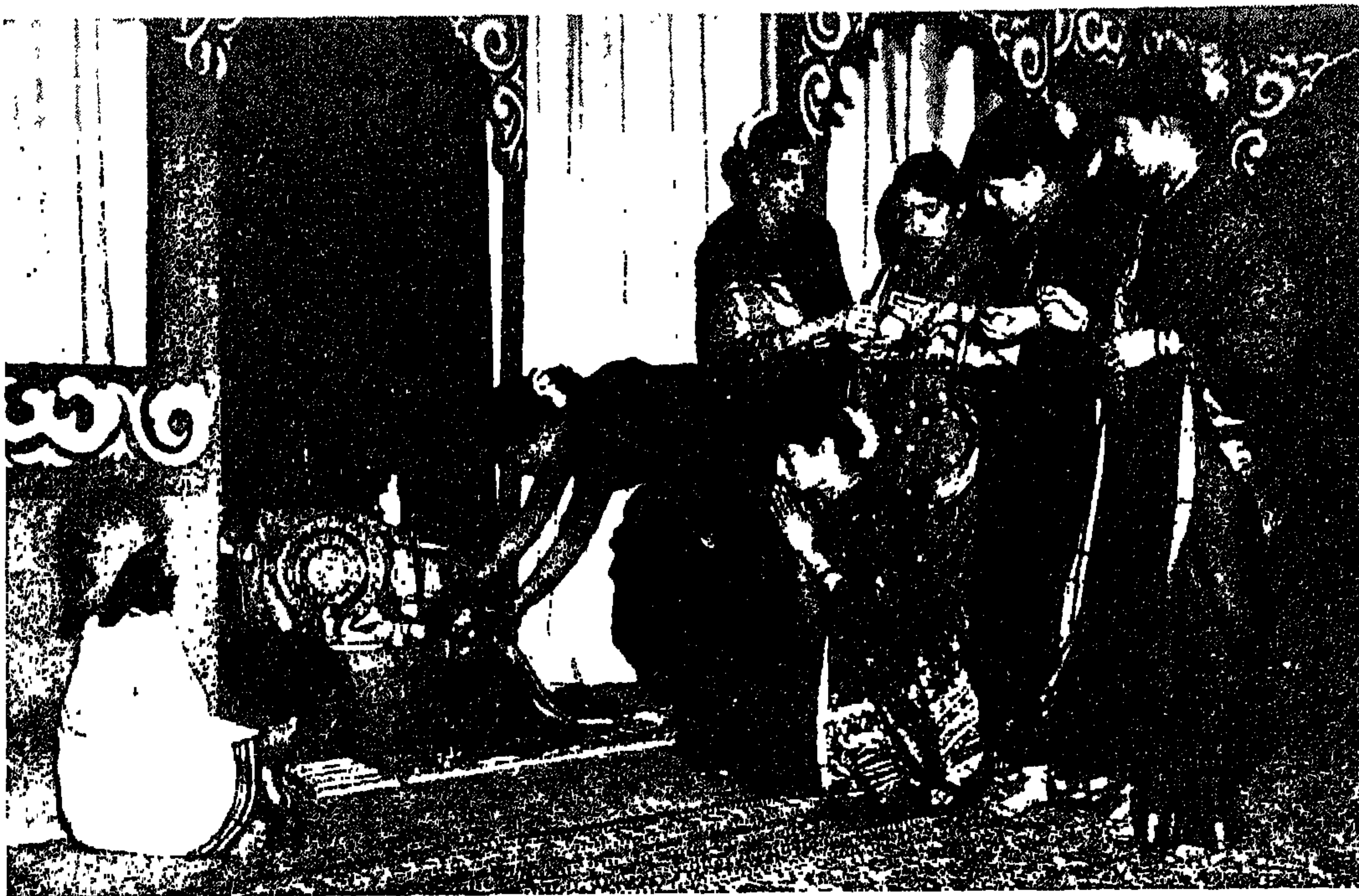




A SCENE FROM THE MALAYALAM PLAY, *Transformation*

A SCENE FROM THE MALAYALAM PLAY *Marthanda Varma*

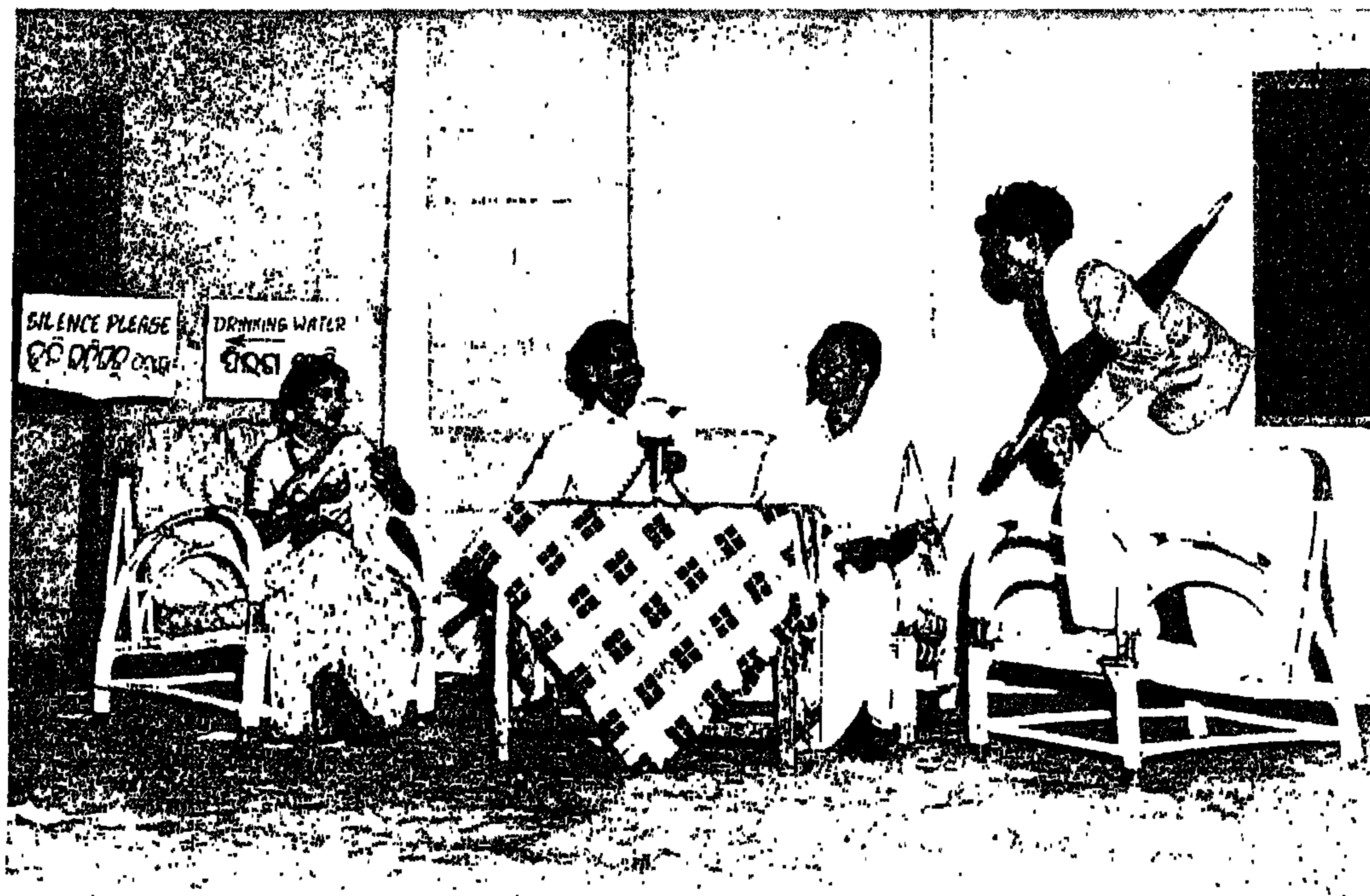




A SCENE FROM THE MARATHI PLAY, *Sharada*

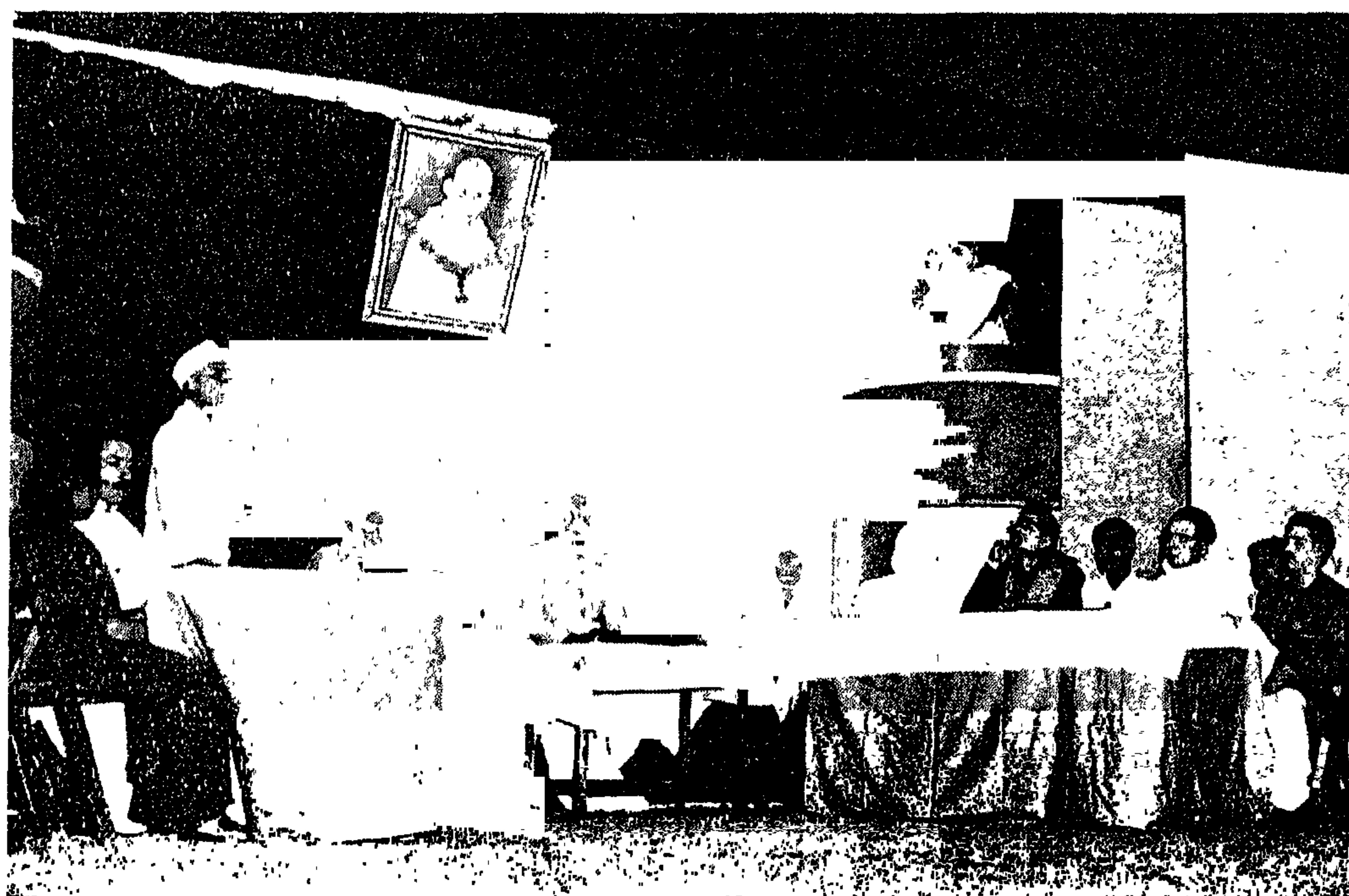
A SCENE FROM THE MARATHI PLAY, *Bhaubandki*

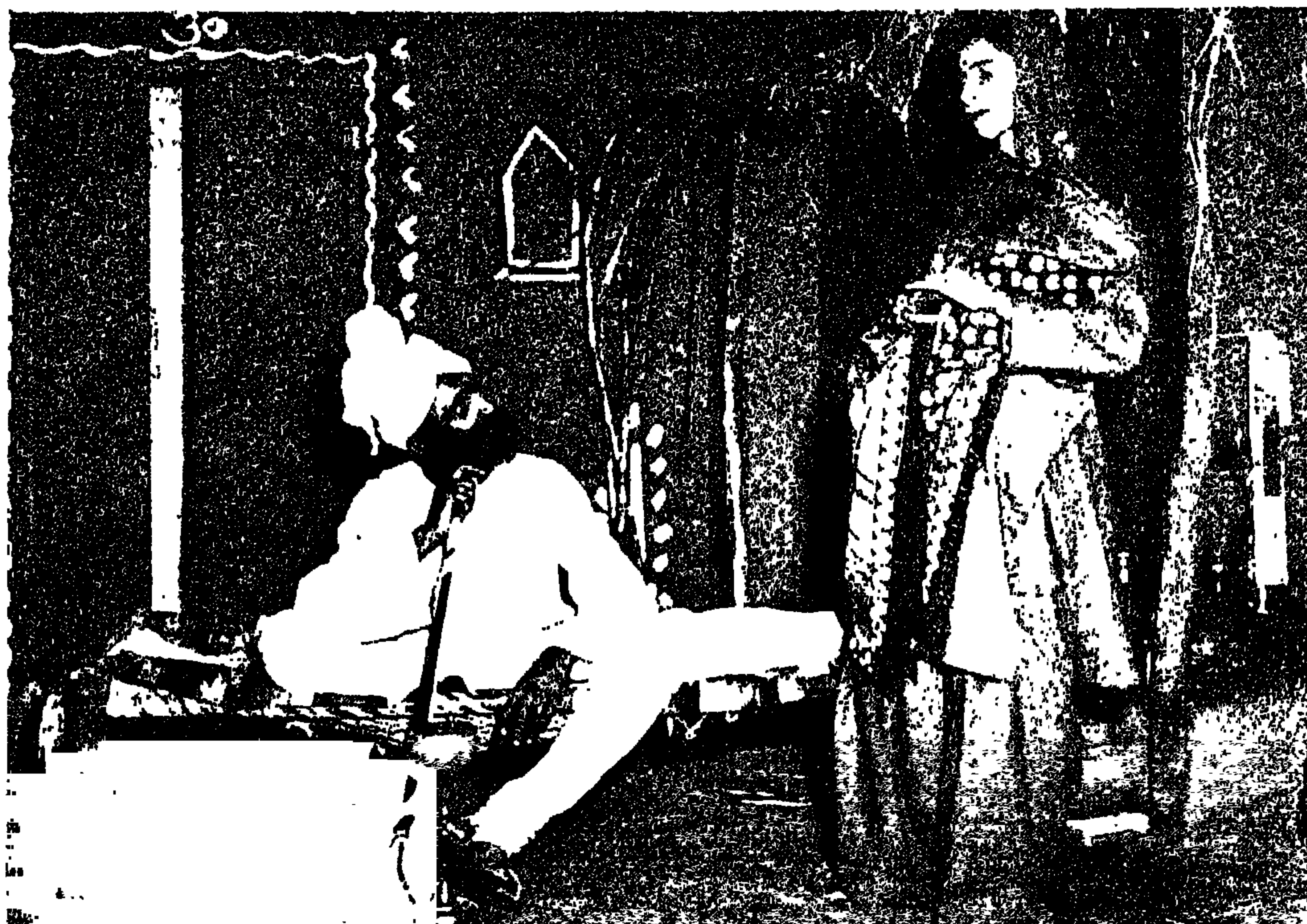




A SCENE FROM THE ORIYA PLAY, *Para-Kalam*

ANOTHER SCENE FROM *Para-Kalam*





A SCENE FROM THE PUNJABI PLAY, *Khoo De Manh Te*

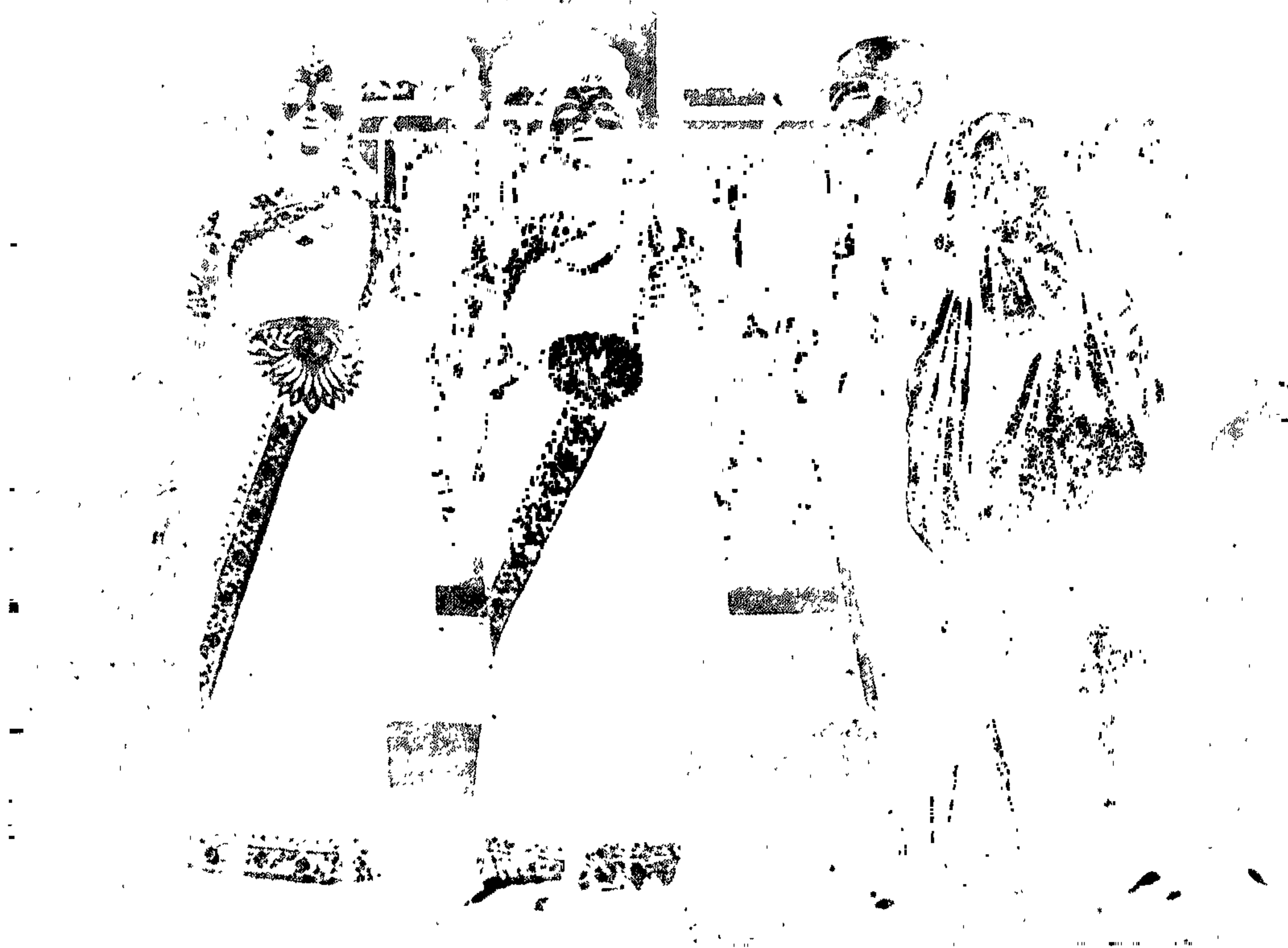
A SCENE FROM THE PUNJABI PLAY, *Pichhal Pairi*





A SCENE FROM THE TAMIL PLAY, *Tholan*

A SCENE FROM A TAMIL PLAY

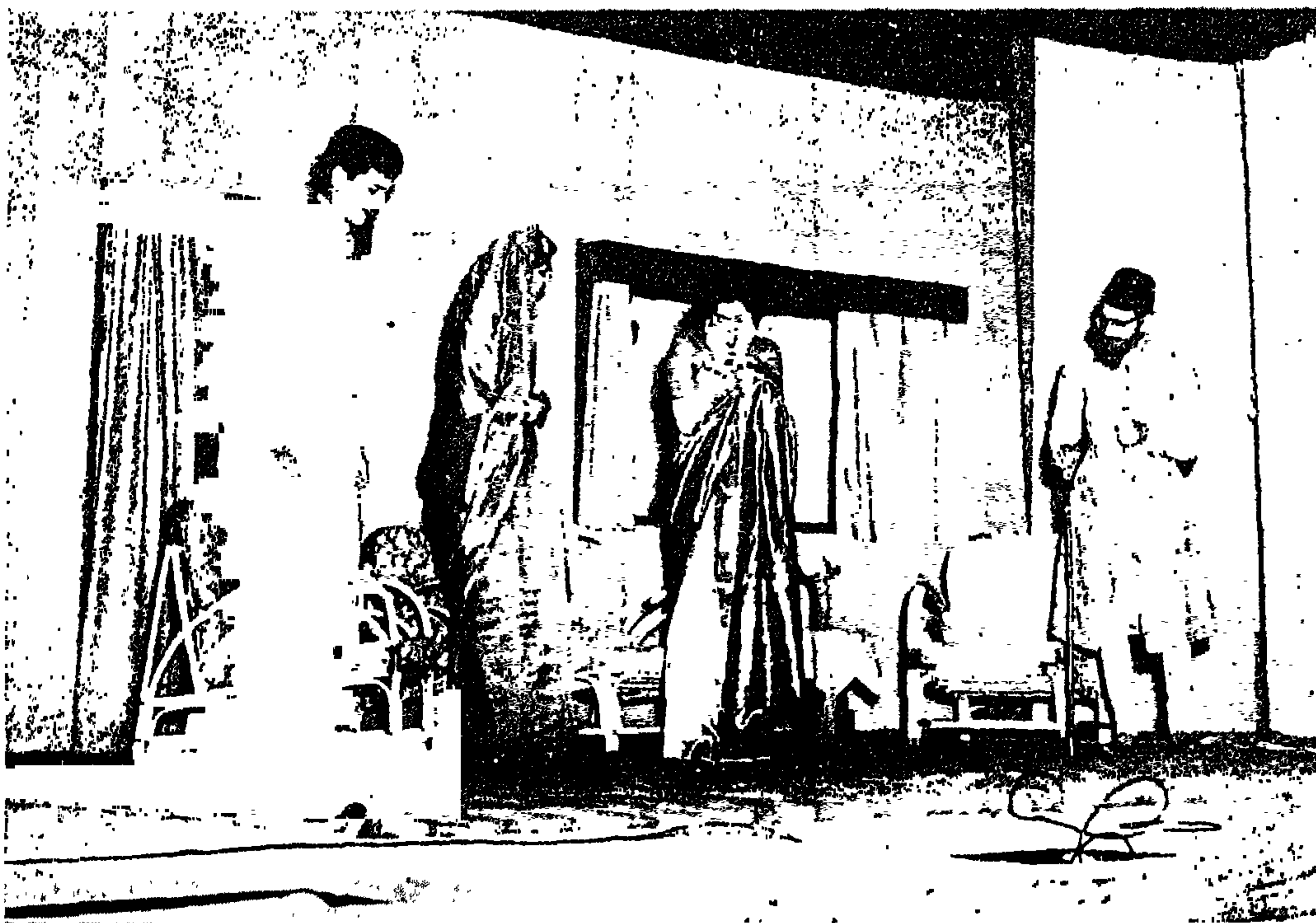




A SCENE FROM THE TELUGU PLAY, *Shri Krishna Tulabharam*

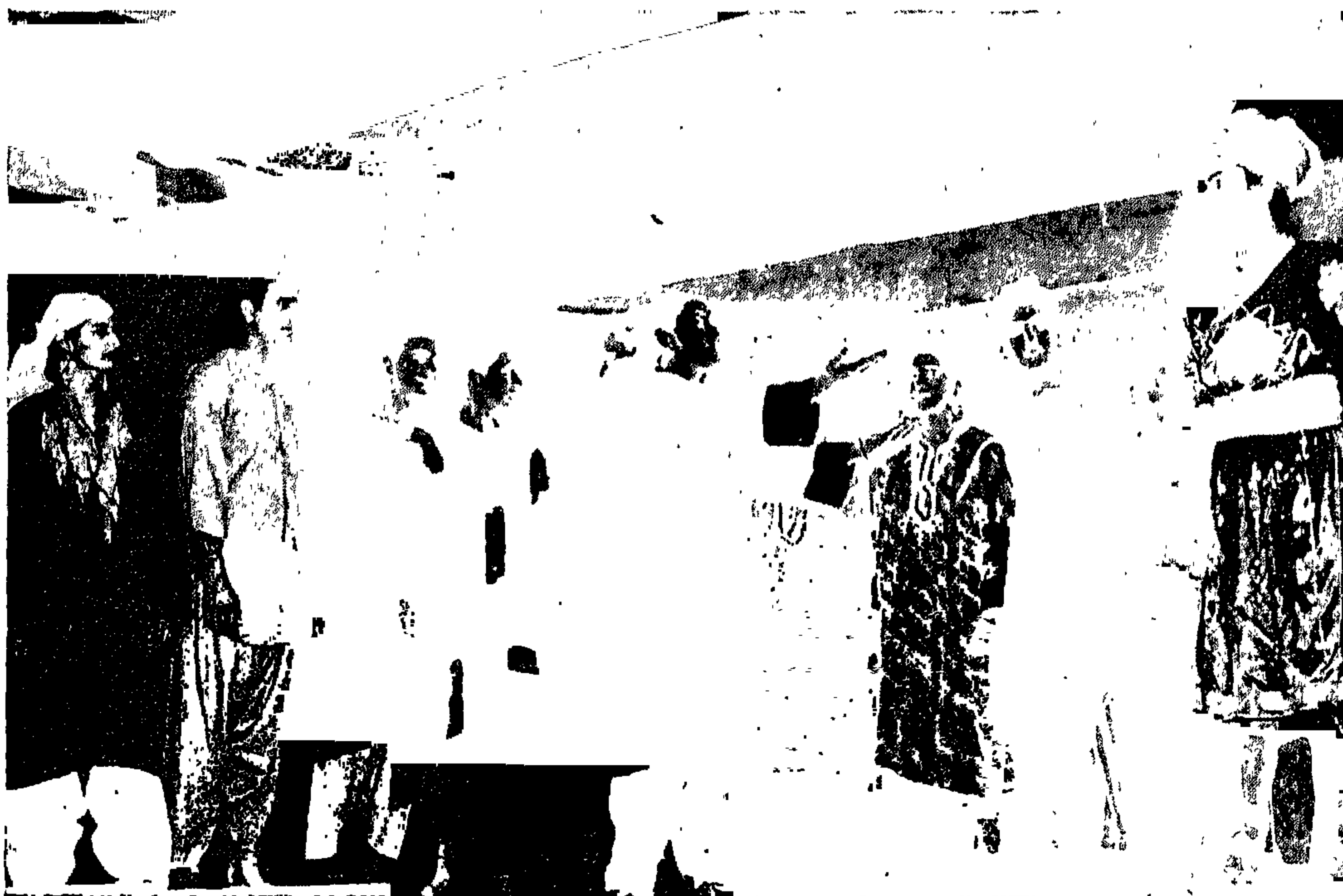
A SCENE FROM THE TELUGU PLAY, *Usha Parinayam*





A SCENE FROM THE URDU PLAY, *Nai Raushni*

A SCENE FROM THE URDU PLAY, *Vadi Ki Goonj*



haps, for that reason created an interest in many others. Amateur performances grew in number from this time onwards, though no single troupe could maintain any organised existence. Nevertheless, the organisation and dissolution of amateur troupes played a useful part in the history of the Kannada stage. The amateurs, being educated people, felt the need of modern dramas. As the demand grew, the supply appeared. For the first time, educated Kannadigas turned their minds towards the writing of original plays.

No child can learn to talk except by imitating its parents and others near it; and no language can produce original literature except through imitation of others. Before original plays could be written in Kannada, translations were being done for years. Translations of classical Sanskrit plays were too highbrow for the villagers, and not modern enough for the educated. Of course, there were translations of English plays too. But in the early days such translations were not found attractive except by those who knew them in the original. It is for this reason that the play called *Pativashikarana* marks a turning point in the story of modern Kannada drama. This play was a translation of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer.* It was something more than a mere translation. Not only the names of the characters but the very social atmosphere was changed and if the author, the late Shri Vasudevachar Kerur, had not informed his readers, no one would have suspected that it was a translation. For this reason, the play held the attention of even those who knew no English. Here was a play steeped in the atmosphere of contemporary Karnatak society.

Pativashikarana rightly marks the beginning of the modern phase of the Kannada stage. From now on we come across a number of writers who have original plays to their credit. In the early days and in the absence of a stage, dramas were written in an almost literary style. Nobody, however, noticed the artificiality of language or the unsuitability of these plays to theatrical conditions.

The story of the modern Kannada stage may suitably begin with the dramatists who inspired amateur activities in Karnatak. Two earlier dramatists, late Shri T.P. Kailasam

of Bangalore and Shri Narayanrao Huilgol of Gadag, may be mentioned in this connection. Shri Kailasam was an active member of the A.D.A. of Bangalore; as a student, he had occasion to witness Ibsen's plays produced in England. He was a born poet. His first play, known as *Tollugatti* (hollow and sound) deals with the problems of modern education. But more than the problem, it was the art with which "Kai" (as he was known) presented it that made people love him and laugh with him. Kai did what was unthought of (or unpardonable) in those days. His characters were true and contemporary, his treatment sympathetic, his humour scintillating and his power of evoking pictures masterly. Another of his plays *Home-rulu*, is one of his best. All the plays of Kailasam were in prose and short. Several of his one-act plays are brilliant.

The other dramatist, Shri Narayanrao, is also a pioneer. His play *Stree-dharmarahasya* was the first original modern play written at about the same time as *Tollugatti*. Shri Narayanrao, belonging to Bombay Karnatak, was more influenced by the Marathi stage. Bombay Karnatak, however, produced another original dramatist who, like Kailasam, was influenced by modern English plays. Like Kailasam, Shriranga (the pen name of this dramatist) looked to contemporary society for his themes. If Kailasam ridiculed, Shriranga thundered. The plays of Shriranga are largely responsible for the early revival of amateur activities in that part of Karnatak. Kailasam and Shriranga both wrote for the theatre as well. Although so far it is the amateurs who have mostly produced these plays, the Kannada stage may be said to have been influenced in various ways by the plays of these writers.

Meanwhile, Shri K. Sivaram Karanth was writing and producing social plays at about the same time. He was the first dramatist to write and produce operas in Kannada.

These three dramatists, pioneers in their own way, wrote their plays in prose and all of them knew the stage. But there were many others who wrote plays and some like Shri Govind Pai or K.V. Puttappa who wrote plays in verse also. The second quarter of the century may be said to be the golden age of the modern Kannada drama. Shri Bendre, Shri A.N. Krishna Rao, Shri Krishna Kumar, the late Shri "Samsa", Shri C.K.

Venkataramayya and a host of others wrote plays which were enthusiastically produced by the amateurs.

Many younger writers were also inspired to write plays. The advent of the radio on the one hand and periodicals on the other encouraged quick writing, but it seems to have reached saturation point.

Once again the development has been one-sided. Though good and better dramas were being written, the stage did not show much improvement. So far the task of building up the modern Kannada stage has been left to the amateurs but although amateurs are enlightened enough to experiment, they lack a sustaining quality. The professional stage has almost ceased to exist. Apparently, history is going to repeat itself. If it does, then the time will soon come when modern plays will be produced by the professional stage.

KASHMIRI DRAMA

Mohanlal Aima

The history of Kashmiri drama falls into three periods. The first which lasted up to the fifteenth century when Yusuf Shah Chak ruled over Kashmir takes us back to the times of Buddhist and Hindu kings who patronised musicians and actors. The second period covers the four hundred years of Mughal rule, and that of the Afghans and Sikhs. From 1938, it entered upon its third period which ushered in modern Kashmiri drama.

The Kashmiri Hindu has always been a staunch follower of Shaivism. He loves music, dance, and drama, and these have had a religious sanction behind them from the earliest times. We have ample historical evidence to show that in the early days it was essential to have morning and evening sessions of music and dance in all temples. About 2000 years ago Maharaja Jalauka offered from among his 1,002 court dancers as many as 100 to the god of the temple at Jyether near Gupkar. Every house, as a matter of fact, patronised these arts and boys and girls were often taught by their mothers who were themselves talented artists. In the 10th century, Maharaja Cakravarman married a professional low-caste dancer named Hansi. But her art was considered so sacred and ennobling that she and even her relations were allowed to enter the temples. Her children were given rights equal to those of the Brahmins. There is also definite evidence to prove that, in the days of Kshemendra, Kashmir had a theatre of its own. The popularity of dance, drama, and music at the time of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, one of the most popular Kashmiri kings, has been mentioned in detail by two important contemporary historians, Jonaraja and Shrivar. While describing the yearly spring festival held at Bijbehara, they wrote: "A magnificent stage was erected for the royal court where the famous dancers Tara and Ansu also performed to the great applause of the King and the people." Shrivar in his descriptions has repeatedly used

the word "actor". And both the historians have dwelt at length on the 49 modes of dancing so skilfully brought out by the artists during these performances. Thus, drama was built up with music and dance, and the story either revolved round a mythological theme or touched upon some topical subject. Other essentials, such as the make-up, costume, and stage-setting, were not ignored. Colourful curtains were hung with bold pictures befitting the sequence painted on them ; the stage had elaborate settings, and gorgeous costumes were worn by the actors who were appropriately made up. Music, mostly following the principles laid down in *Sangita-Chudamani* was also pressed into service to heighten the effect and evoke the emotions that the drama required. Probably the earliest language used was Prakrit which later changed with time. No definite evidence is to show that Kashmiri was used as a medium.

About the 14th century, which marks the beginning of the second period, dance, drama, and music seem to have received a definite setback in the rest of India, but they did not disappear completely in Kashmir. They trickled down to the people. Kashmiri drama was banished from the royal court, but back in the villages the class of artists known as the *Bhands* are still known for their *jashn*, which is even now the most popular form of dance, drama, and music in Kashmir. These *Bhands* form a class by themselves and are mostly found at Kulgam, Wahthore Akingom, Bumzu and Aishmuqam. Essentially agriculturists, these artists give variety shows to the entire village and their performances may extend from dusk to dawn. It is probably from these that the word *pather* has become naturalised in Kashmiri and describes somewhat artificially and incompletely the drama as we understand it today. One of the most popular elements in the drama enacted by the *Bhands* is the *darza pather* which is saturated with satire and mimicry. But one has to make allowances for its mediocre standard. The sessions start with a musical prelude on the *shahnai*, *naqara* and *dhol* which introduces a galaxy of dancers, followed by two humorous characters who act as narrators to the end. The items covered in these shows are mostly based on topics which closely touch the villagers and vividly express

life in a Kashmiri village. Sir Walter Lawrence while conducting settlement work in the Valley found that some of the plays enacted by the *Bhands* clearly depicted aggression of the ruling classes over the masses, more particularly the agriculturists. But this theatre could not thrive without substantial financial aid, which was difficult to come by in those days. Naturally, indiscipline crept in which lowered the players in the eyes of society. The actor came to be known as *Rass Kath*, an expression which expressed nothing but contempt for stage artists.

Later, a few professional theatres were started and plays like *Krishna-Sudama*, *Vir Abhimanyu*, and Agha Hashr Kashmiri's plays like *Ba Wafa Qatil*, *Khoon ka Khoon* were staged. It was in this period that one of the earliest attempts was made to stage Kashmiri plays like *Raja Harishchandra*. Unfortunately, they had to introduce certain foreign features in their haphazard technique. Attempts were made to run a theatre on a co-operative basis but without success. The veteran artists did, however, succeed in erecting a stage and a hall at Dewan Bagh, now known as Karan Nagar, but, unfortunately, their zeal did not last.

Thus, there followed a vacuum and the only drama to be found was the short humorous skit performed by scattered groups of artists who entertained marriage parties. The Sanatan Dharam Sabha, however, maintained its tradition of enacting Ramlila during the Dussera.

It was only after 1938 that serious attempts were made once more to revive Kashmiri drama. A start was made by the S.P. College Amateur Dramatic Club which withstood the great opposition that still existed against the theatre. Within a couple of years the Club successfully staged a number of plays and by that time other organisations came into existence, the most noteworthy among them being the Vasanta Girls School which went a step further and successfully staged features in Kashmiri verse. The Rashtriya Kala Mandir started its career with a full length play in Kashmiri namely *Widwah* (the widow) which was immensely popular. The Kashmir Sudhar Samiti also started a theatre of its own and has had it ever since. The stage has proved to be a potent means of social

uplift. It is indeed gratifying that the Samiti is now able to own a hall of its own and to continue its theatrical activities. The already existing Sanatan Dharam Sabha too organised the Sanatan Dharam Kala Mandir and has so far staged plays on a comparatively large scale. Now the Government has also started encouraging and subsidising the stage. Actually, the Amar Singh College has already built a stage of its own on more or less modern lines.

The old veterans of Kashmiri drama found this revival so spontaneous that they did not hesitate to guide and help the youngsters. The late Pandit Rughnath, popularly known as Rugha, who broke one of his legs in the course of erecting an open-air stage and later succumbed to the fracture was available, as long as he lived, for assistance and advice. This enabled the young artists to learn the old technique of stagecraft and harmonise it with modern trends.

The historic day, October 26, 1947, mobilised the entire talent of Kashmir. All the leading musicians, dancers, actors, painters, and writers founded the Kashmir National Cultural Front under the inspiring guidance of Khwaja Ghulam Mohamad Sadiq. The artists kept up the morale of the Kashmiris and inspired them to rise and hit back the raider who had reached the outskirts of Srinagar. The patriotic songs sung by the musicians in the streets and lanes, and the huge paintings drawn by painters depicting the atrocities of the raiders, strengthened the determination of the Kashmiris to fight the raiders. Thus, the Kashmir National Cultural Front was able to knit itself into a powerful organisation and to do marvellous work. A permanent stage was erected within a few weeks and the artists dedicated themselves to its cause. Some of their plays like *Kashmir Yeh Hai*, *Shaheed Sherwani* and *Swali* were missed by hardly any Kashmiri. Even the jawans found time to attend these shows before marching to the front. The technique of these performances demonstrated a blending of the old and the modern stage. The present-day influences of the Western Theatre, the lighting, three dimensional sets and the playback effects were also used to some extent. The Kashmir National Cultural Front soon formed an important wing of the Kashmir Militia of that time and the Kashmiri

artist in his enthusiasm did not hesitate to enlist as a sepoy and work in the cultural organisation with the soldier's pay. Soon after, Government aid was provided which enabled the artists to carry their plays to the remotest corners of the Valley and set up small cultural units there. In this heroic strife we lost a promising artist, Shamlal Baqaya, who died of tuberculosis.

Among those who are responsible for inspiring the Kashmiri artist, mention must be made of Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad who reorganised the Kashmiri National Cultural Front into a bigger organisation covering its cultural activities all over the State. Probably, for the first time in the history of Kashmir, an all State cultural convention was held under his presidentship. He is also responsible for the success in giving dignity to this type of labour. It has been realised that the tempo of progress and reconstruction of a country can best be gauged by its cultural movements. At present Kashmir can easily boast of a well-organised network of cultural centres in the whole State, with each unit showing marvellous progress. Among the most important of Kashmir's drama units at present, the Government College for Women at Srinagar is doing solid work. One of its latest features, *Bambur Yamberzal* (the Narcissus and the Bumblebee), is an attempt to stage an opera of the Western type. It has stolen a march on the others and discovered for us talented artists like Zia Durrani.

MALAYALAM DRAMA

P. Damodaran Pillai

Of all the indigenous forms of dramatic art, the Kathakali is the most representative of the life and mind of the people of Kerala. The history of Kerala is marked by a succession of wars among the numberless chieftains of petty principalities, each making a bid for supremacy over his neighbour or for the undisputed hegemony of Kerala. The people were reputed warriors, brought up in an atmosphere of constant warfare, of supreme military valour and brilliant personal heroism. The land was strewn with gymnasiums of the ancient Greek type, and the young people received their military training at these centres. It was not a matter of chance, then, that this had its repercussion on the typical Kerala dance drama of the Kathakali. The Kathakali actor is a soldier in his rigorous discipline and training and he is initiated into the art, even from boyhood, and learns it at school which is like a military gymnasium, where he undergoes a course of intense training from boyhood to manhood.

The drama itself, whatever may be its theme, has always the ring of a military performance, with the free use of challenging language between the hero and the villain, followed by exciting fights in a tense atmosphere. It is true that Keralites took pride in wars and heroes and the dance drama unmistakably reflects this characteristic which eventually took such a turn that, when a few years ago the *Sakuntala* was adapted for the Kathakali stage, the innocent bee was immediately converted into a vertiable Rakshasa, whom Dushyanta had to deal with as best he could, in the right Kathakali fashion.

The Kathakali is pre-eminently the art of the complex and the elaborate. The training of the actor, as mentioned above, is intense in every detail, his costume and facial make-up are minutely designed and worked out, and his performance is characterised by an intricacy and finish which we hardly meet with elsewhere. In the simple and homely setting of the tradi-

tional stage, where the same equipment serves for all the varied scenes, where every consideration of the mechanical stage effect goes by the board, he easily creates an unearthly atmosphere, a different world altogether, the stentorian drums and other musical instruments all the while adding to its weirdness.

Poetic literature, vocal and instrumental music, dance, histrionics, and costume, all enter into the structure of the Kathakali performance. It is an example of the perfect organisation of various elements into a balanced unity, a single whole. It is conceived and executed in rhythm represented by 'tala' by which the actor, the accompanying vocalists, and the musical instruments are united and controlled from start to finish, and any violation by any one of them is frowned upon by the sophisticated among the audience. The mastery of the rhythm by an actor is the measure of his perfection which demands that the slightest movement of his rolling eyes, his vibrating facial muscles and finger-tips, not to speak of his hands and feet, should always be in strict consonance with the universal rhythm of the whole eerie show.

Composed of folk as well as classical elements, this extraordinary dance drama is the noblest surviving example of the traditional Indian theatre.

The themes are drawn from the never-failing Hindu myths and epics. The performance opens with relentless drumming at the end of which we are already in another world, peopled with great gods and goddeses, heroes brave in battle, women beautiful with love's passion, and the whole host of the Hindu mythology. It is a new world, a supernatural world of vast proportions, in which the grotesque, the romantic, and the extremely beautiful are intermingled by the power of superior art, spelt in precise symbols and spectacular gestures, which take the place of speech. The actor, by the sheer power of his art, unaided by the extraneous adjuncts of the modern drama, carries the spectator to any place he likes with effortless ease—to the heights of Mt. Kailas, the eternal abode of the Lord, to the infernal regions of the demons, palaces rich with lotus lakes and vast terraces, to crowded cities, or deep jungles. And again, every emotion portrayed—love, jealousy, fear, or anger—tugs, as it were, at the very

nerve-strings of one's heart.

The origin of this great art may be traced to the "Kudiyattam" prevalent in Kerala at the occupation of the Chakkiyar caste, referred to in the "Cilappadikāram", a great Tamil epic composed in the 2nd century A.D. Later, one of the Perumals who ruled Kerala in the 9th century, and Tolan, a poet scholar of the same period, made improvements in the art, and it is of interest to note that the latter's treatise on the dramatic art contains detailed instructions to the actors in the mode of acting each part, which read like an anticipatory exposition of the present day Kathakali actor's technique. Since the days of Tolan, the evolution of the art has become more and more complex till it assumed a completely different aspect in the form of the Kathakali with the opening of the modern period in the history of Malayalam literature and art. Poet kings and poet courtiers have made substantial contributions to its literature and histrionics, and have so greatly improved its theatrical settings that it leaves nothing to be desired.

In spite of its military features, the Kathakali theatre was designed to instil devotion into the hearts of common men and to bring peace, depicting the eternal warfare between good and evil, and the ultimate victory of the former. In the Kudiyattam the theatre was mainly the medium of artistic happiness, derived from a concentrated form of histrionics, while in the Kathakali, on the other hand, some aspects of the art are given further emphasis, greater range, and wider appeal.

With the age-old Kudiyattam and the Kathakali, Sanskrit dramaturgy flourished in the land as early as, if not earlier than, the 9th century when Tolan is said to have made fun of the ruling Perumal for plagiarising the *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa in his Sanskrit drama, the *Subhadra-Dhananjaya*. Many forms of Sanskrit drama held the stage for quite a long period until the dramas themselves were translated into Malayalam in the last hundred years.

Plays written at present in the western style are either experimental or too tendentious to claim any serious notice, though social and other problems are sought to be solved through the medium of the theatre. Ibsenism is sometimes

the fashion but the fact that Ibsen himself adhered to characterisation in the drama is often lost sight of, only to betray the banality of the performance of the dramatist himself. In this welter of ultra modernism there stand out two dramatists, Kainakara M. Padmanabha Pillai and his brother M. Kumara Pillai, whose dramatic productions show greater insight into human nature and life. The *Velu Tampi Delava* of the former is an attempt to present the tragedy of a few towering personalities in their historical setting to which they succumb—but heroically. And, the *Mohavum Muktiyum* (Illusion and Liberation) of the latter is the dramatisation of an eternal verity. It is an allegorical piece, the only one of its kind in Malayalam, with the truth shining out through the quaint mystery which envelops the whole theme. Both the attempts are conceived on a grandiose scale, their theatre representing the greatness of human nature in the midst of great obstacles and trying situations. Though thoroughly modern in execution they have not cut themselves off from their own traditions in order to shock society for the sake of shocking.

The Kerala theatre, though regarded sometimes as the strict monopoly of the higher castes, has never been their exclusive property at any time during the centuries. The lower castes enjoyed its pleasure including the pleasure of the high-brow Kathakali itself. But religion, which held sway for ages has been thrust into the background and the theatre is more socialised than ever in the Kerala of today.

THE MARATHI THEATRE

Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni

The story of the Marathi stage is one of supreme dedication. It is the creation of writers and playwrights who were gifted with an extraordinary sense of social awareness, It arose out of a hard struggle with social realities. Ultimately, it became the most dynamic force, moulding the outlook of the people, both socially and politically. Drama has been used in Maharashtra in the traditional way for the spiritual uplift of the people and at the same time it has acted as the most powerful weapon against social, economic, and political evils.

As is well known, the Marathi stage conjured up a world of different *rasas*, a characteristic not generally shared by the other parts of India. The dramatic portrayal of the various *rasas* touched the hearts of the people. The representation of intriguing situations, sometimes from the *Puranas* and other mythological lore, had thus had their intended effect as the immediate allusions were always to the political and social events of the day. It is interesting to note that these old purposive dramas have not ceased to attract people even today because of their inherent artistic merit. They still retain their influence over Marathi literature as model works of literary creation.

Another striking feature of the Marathi stage is its wonderful combination of the writer, actor, and musician. Maharashtra was fortunate in having social thinkers like Agarkar, Kelkar, and Savarkar, and political agitators like Khadilkar and Wamanrao Joshi who turned to drama and naturally their works became powerful carriers of their ideals. Musicians like Bhaurao Kolhatkar and Bal-Gandharva also devoted themselves to drama and the theatre drew the best out of these wizards. Unlike ordinary actors, these musicians were able to cast the magic spell of their gifts over their audiences by lending the *rasas* an artistic form. Naturally, the people

were charmed by their performances with the indirect result that an equally powerful musical tradition was built up in Maharashtra. So, if the Maharashtrians are extraordinarily music-minded today, it is mainly because of the services of these pioneers in the field of drama.

A significant development in Maharashtra was the growth of dramatic criticism from the early days. Public opinion, as reflected in these criticisms, was the guiding force behind these dramatists and artists. Press criticism also evoked a new interest, which explains why the people welcomed experimentation in the theatre. In fact, the artists accepted criticism as the whetstone on which to sharpen their faculties. This healthy co-operation between the critic and the artist from the very early days has contributed much to the development of the Marathi stage.

The harmonious blending of these diverse influences in its formative stage brought about the Golden Age of the Marathi stage which lasted for nearly half a century.

It is now generally agreed that the Marathi theatre, in its present form, was born in 1843. No doubt there are references to drama, actors, and the stage in ancient Vaishnava literature ; and there is also evidence that mythological plays were staged in Goa even in the middle of the eighteenth century. But, since Goa is not within our border, technically 1843 may be taken to be the year of beginning of Marathi drama.

This beginning was in the nature of an imitation of the Kannada theatre. It is possible that separate theatres existed both in Goa and in Karnatak, two neighbouring parts of the South. When the Rajah of Sangli saw a Kannada play, he asked his court *keertankar*, the late Vishnudas Bhave, to organise a troupe to produce plays in Marathi. This troupe evolved a mixed type of drama, which held its own for a long time. Its backbone was a repertoire of songs. The actors taking part in the performance were familiar with the trend of the plot, and improvised dialogue to fill in the gaps between two successive songs. There was no complete play as a uniform and permanent creation. It is worth noting that Bhave's troupe, which copied Kannada drama, produced a few Hindi plays also during its career in Bombay.

Touring companies followed suit and started giving performances throughout the length and breadth of Maharashtra. Among these were Narharbuwa's and the Aryoddharak, which started producing prose plays that were anything but extempore. Such plays were usually translations. It was during this period that Shakespeare was translated and adapted into Marathi. A version of *The Comedy of Errors* was part of the repertory of these two companies.

The Shahunagarwasi was a touring company given to performing mainly mythological plays. Ganpatrao Joshi, an actor who worked histrionic miracles on the stage, especially in the role of the poet-saint Tukaram, and Balwantrao Joag, a studious actor who played female parts, brought this company to the fore. Prof. Vasudeo Balkrishna Kelkar recognised their talent from the beginning. This scholar from Poona's Deccan College, a veritable beehive of contemporary dramatic activity, produced a Marathi version of *The Taming of the Shrew* for this company. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, the well known social reformer and colleague of Lokmanya Tilak, had already rendered *Hamlet* into Marathi. Ganpatrao Joshi thrilled a generation of Marathi playgoers with his part as the saturnine hero of Shakespeare's tragedy.

During this period, Shakespeare was widely translated into Marathi, mostly in academic versions that could not be staged. Govind Ballal Deval, an experienced man of the theatre, adapted a translation of *Othello* by Mahadeoshastri Kolhatkar for the Aryoddharak . He himself played the hero, Zunzarrao, an indigenous version of the jealous Moor. This is the only translation of a Shakespeare play that has survived its time and is still popular with Marathi audience.

Another typically timeless product is the late Annasaheb Kirloskar's *Sangeet Saubhadra.* This song-studded mythological play, with its slyly humorous social undertones, was a successor to *Sangeet Sakuntala,* which inaugurated the era of the Kirloskar Company in 1880. The music of Karnatak and Gujarat influenced this actor-dramatist a great deal. With a heavenly singer like Bhaurao Kolhatkar playing the heroine in the company's mythological adaptations, prose drama in Maharashtra received a temporary setback. After Kirloskar,

Deval produced a play conceived on the same leisurely scale, *Shap-Sambhram*, based on Bana's *Kadambari*. When Bhaurao felt the supply of suitable plays was inadequate, he announced a prize for a new, stageworthy effort. The lucky recipient of this award was Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar, a humorist who submitted an entirely new type of play, *Veer-Tanaya*. Its songs were tuned to classical *ragas* and also followed the simpler music of Urdu drama.

Kolhatkar's musical innovations influenced the songs of *Sharada*, Deval's almost only independent effort. A finely constructed drama based on a revolutionary social theme, this work embodies the permanent essence of a topical and delicate problem. The role of Sharada, a young girl who is forced by her money-grabbing father to marry a rich old man, was later immortalised by Keshav Bhonsale on the stage of the Swadesh-hitachintak.

Bhonsale broke away from this company in 1908, and founded the Lalit-kaladarsha. Meanwhile the Swadesh-hitachintak carried on fairly successfully with *Kunj-Vihari*, Mama Warerkar's first play. The costuming of this play, with its genuinely provincial emphasis, attracted a large number of non-Maharashtrian playgoers to the Marathi theatre.

Up to now, Marathi drama had catered only for the upper layer of society. It was Madhavrao Patankar who wrote plays with an eye to the ordinary villager. Simple plots with a straightforward message drew the ignorant masses away from their usual pleasures symbolised by the local *tamasha*. Babajirao Rane, compositor in a printing press, was another dramatist in the popular tradition of Patankar. He carried a generating set with him and staged plays literally in bright light in the farthest villages of Maharashtra. He died of heart failure while playing the role of the saint's wife in his extremely popular devotional play, *Tukaram*.

After Bhaurao's death, the Kirloskar management put on Kolhatkar's *Mook-nayaka*. It was a model of its kind dealing with drunkenness. About the same time, a handsome young actor-singer filled the niche by Bhaurao in the Kirloskar fold. Named " Bal-Gandharva " by no less a playgoer than the late -Lokmanya Tilak, this actor was to become the rage of Maha.

rashtra and was ultimately to be honoured by the President of the Indian Republic.

Bhonsale and Bal-Gandharva started an era all their own on the Marathi stage. Men of strong personal taste, and as talented as they were fastidious, these two remoulded the drama of their time by acting in plays written by Mama Warerkar and Kakasaheb Khadilkar over a period of years. Khadilkar had established himself in the Maharashtra Natak Mandali, founded in Poona in 1905. This company, composed of a band of young intellectuals, followed the tradition of academic support maintained by the Shakespearean actors of the Shahunagarwasi. Khadilkar's early mythological and historical plays show the strong influence of Shakespearean tragedy. This studious group of prose actors introduced modern make-up for the first time and made several improvements in stage decor.

Khadilkar's *Keechak-Wadh* ostensibly retelling an episode in the life of the Pandavas, is an intelligent and forceful allegory satirising the Curzon regime. Banned by the British Government, it was ultimately resurrected by the Congress Ministry in 1937. During the period of national discontent, the Marathi stage was not only in the vanguard of the freedom movement, but also underwent far-reaching changes in the technique of writing and producing plays. More than the newspaper, the play forged the aspirations of mass sentiment into a constructive weapon to fight against the tyranny of the rulers. Actors, dramatists, and playgoers, all became part of the larger national upsurge.

Even Khadilkar's *Manapman*, a predominantly musical play which made the best use of the unique art of Bal-Gandharva, is based on the inequality between the classes. His *Vidyaharan*, incorporating music by the late Govindrao Tembe, emphasised, under the guise of a mythological episode, the evil of drinking imported by scholars from abroad. These plays were produced by the Kirloskar company, which soon suffered a split that was never to be repaired. Bal-Gandharva, with Tembe and the great character actor, Ganpatrao Bodas, formed his own company, which was to reign supreme till the cinema established itself. Tembe left the Gandharva fold later,

but his influence in the field of musical drama was evident right up to his death recently. And while Bal-Gandharva has long been incapacitated by age, Bodas still plays, although in his seventies, all the old roles that once made him so famous.

Various companies suffered from the tendency on the part of the main actors to leave the parent body and start an independent, often short-lived, concern of their own.

Yeshwantrao Tipnis, a prominent actor of the Maharashtra company, formed his own company, only to stage a few historical and social plays and close down. Among his successes were *Matsyagandha* by his own pen, *Totayache Band* by N.C. Kelkar, the editor of *Kesari*, and *Vadhu-Pareeksha*, a prose play by Kolhatkar.

Though the companies that staged musical plays were the most successful commercially, they encouraged competition between leading actor-singers to unprofitable lengths. Bhonsale and Bal-Gandharva were joined by Rambhau Kundgolkar, alias Sawai Gandharva. He popularised the Kirana school of music on the stage of the Natya-kalapravartak, which had been giving musical adaptations of Shakespeare. Bhonsale soon realised that this suicidal competition was responsible for the utter neglect into which acting and speech had fallen. Therefore, he invited Mama Warerkar to write for his company and restore the balance.

Warerkar's *Sanyashacha Sansar* dealt with the problem of enforced conversion by Christian missionaries in India, and included characters drawn from almost every part of the country. Bhonsale also staged Warerkar's comedy, *Haach Mulacha Baap*, satirising the evils of the dowry system, and a historical play based on Shivaji's life. In all his productions he employed realistic decor and costume. A unique event of this period was a joint performance of *Manapman* in aid of the Tilak Swaraj Fund started by Mahatma Gandhi. The two leading actor-managers, Bhonsale and Bal-Gandharva, played the hero and the heroine for a single night, fetching Rs. 16,850 from a packed house of 900. Bhonsale died unfortunately a few months later, in 1921.

Bapurao Pendharkar took the helm at the Lalit-kaladarsha, after Bhonsale's death. His production of Warerkar's *Satteche*

Gulam introduced box scenes and realistic properties after western models. His next play, *Turungachya Darant,* was the first play in Marathi to do without scenes. This play of Warerkar's on the theme of untouchability was honoured by the Bombay Congress. However, it was not a success for various reasons, one being the introduction of the entertainment tax on the opening night in 1923. During the period, prose drama was the monopoly of a few troupes that worked mainly in the countryside.

Bal-Gandharva's company prospered on a series of mythological musical dramas writen by Khadilkar to suit the talents of the popular star. Meanwhile, it had taken up the social play, *Ekach Pyala,* by Ram Ganesh Gadkari. This moving tragedy about a respectable lawyer turned drunkard provided both Bodas and Bal-Gandharva with parts to their taste. When Bodas left the company, Gadkari had already written for a smaller company, started by the actor-singer Deenanath, plays full of rhetoric, humour, and pathos. By this time, the rifts had been widening between the touring companies, of which there were no less than forty before the arrival of the talkie.

As the older companies started breaking up into smaller units, the need for new actors as well as dramatists began to grow. The period between the two wars, except for the last few years, was one of bold experimentation. Mythological plays, ever popular with the audience, were now staged with meticulous attention to sets, draperies, and properties. Films projected to show an outdoor scene were also a popular innovation. Actually, the ground was being prepared for modern drama, however feeble its early beginnings.

In 1932, a group of intellectuals started the Natya-manwantar, with a production of *Andhalyachi Shala,* an adaptation by S. V. Wartak of a Norwegian play. The author's wife and Jyotsna Bhole, the wife of Keshavrao Bhole, who composed the music of the play, took the feminine parts. Hirabai Barodekar had already started a company of her own, calling upon her brother and sisters to help her. Both these companies brought actresses to the fore in their own right, but the parent bodies did not last long. Natya-manwantar,

however, set the model for plays conceived in a completely modern vein. Amateur companies continued for some time, but to little effect. To this day, the most significant developments on the Marathi stage have been made by professional companies, and not by amateurs.

With the coming of the talkie, one by one the old theatres started accommodating themselves to this new and more attractive invention. Theatres that had seen Urdu, Marathi and Gujarati dramas flourish on their boards yielded to the cinema. The coming of the film was exploited to some extent by Shamrao Shirgopikar in his productions of mythological plays employing gifted child actors. His company carries on with the same inventiveness to this day. Its child actors continue to join other companies as they grow up.

Between 1934 and 1936, almost all the major companies in Maharashtra closed down. Among these were the Gandharva, the Lalit-kaladarsha, Deenanath's Balwant and the Maharashtra. A company of child actors, the Balmohan, established itself over a period of years when it started producing Pralhad Keshav Atre's comedies. After the late Madhavrao Joshi, Atre is one of the few popular dramatists, whose comedies continue to be staged by amateurs. The Balmohan closed down during the war and Atre turned to film making.

It was in 1942 that the Marathi theatre showed signs of a slow but steady revival. The Natya-niketan run by Motiram Gajanan Rangnekar, and the Little Theatre organised by Parshwanath Altekar came into being. The former, which is still most active, has been staging mainly the social comedies of Rangnekar himself. The latter suffered heavy financial losses after he had staged some of Warerkar's most novel social plays. Touring through towns and cities in Maharashtra kept the Natya-niketan torch burning, while the Little Theatre had to close down after training a few actors.

Both in the technique of production and of dramatic construction, the Marathi play underwent many a change during the last war. Rangnekar's productions have a polish all their own, the credit for which is shared by professional actors. In 1943, the centenary of the Marathi Theatre was an occasion for fresh efforts for a revival of drama. In April

1944, the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh celebrated the centenary with a 14-day Festival, starting with a production of Warerkar's penetrating play, *Saraswat.* Since then, every year, the playgoer in Bombay throngs to the yearly drama festival organised by the Sangh. This organisation has an open air theatre in the city, and is collecting funds for a more permanent structure. It has been responsible for the commissioning of translations of Barrie, Wilde, Galsworthy, and Shakespeare which it has produced with some success.

It is evident that during the last few years, new life has been injected into the Marathi dramatic movement by the active interest shown by theatre-conscious people in Maharashtra itself. Commercially, the staging of plays is still a hazardous proposition. The absence of theatres makes permanent residence and consequent experimentation in production impossible for the companies. The entertainment tax, even though certain classics are exempt from it, is another hurdle. Commercial standards are not always high, while there is no co-ordination and, more important still, no understanding between the amateur and the professional actor. There is still a paucity of new dramatists worthy of the name, though a few young authors have achieved some distinction.

In 1954, the Government of Bombay started an annual competition for amateur plays in Marathi, Gujarati, and Kannada as part of its scheme for the encouragement of the dramatic arts. Handsome prizes are awarded every year and the general public has shown tremendous interest in the Festival of Plays organised in this connection every year. This is a step in the right direction, but it can only partly solve the financial problem. Both the Government and municipal authorities in the towns of Maharashtra must take it upon themselves to find a home for the theatre which it can legitimately call its own, and not a mere favour on the part of cinema owners. Of late, the Government has been trying to organise camps to train tutors in dramatic arts, and efforts are being made to start suitable institutions to give training in the art of acting. The Marathi stage must accept this new type of patronage but, at the same time, continue to improve its literary and technical equipment.

ORIYA DRAMA

B. B. Mishra

The beginnings of drāma and dramatic performances in Orissa can be traced back to early mediaeval times when for the first time the historical sense began to influence men's minds. Sanskrit scholars who had widely travelled brought home with them texts of Sanskrit dramas. These imported dramas influenced and inspired the local pandits to write dramas on themes taken from the epics. They followed the dramaturgy of the *Natya Sastra* and introduced characters mostly from the epics, with the result that the productions suffered in technique. Later, however, production improved through borrowing from the cultures of Utkal's adjoining States. In the opinion of some reputed scholars, the Oriya language, as it now obtains in Orissa, owes its origin to the period from the 8th to 12th century A.D. In this period, with the growth of the Prakrit language, songs and dialogues in Prakrit were gradually introduced into Sanskrit dramas. The reason for such deviations from the past is probably due to the fact that by that time dramatic performances were no longer the prerogative of people knowing Sanskrit. Even the masses had developed an appreciation of these plays. Drama as a literary form is, however, a later development. A robust and refined literary style developed in the 14th century and finally culminated in the composition of the Oriya *Mahabharata* by Sarala Dash in the 15th century. This marked a turning point in the history of Oriya drama.

Subsequently, the art of dramatic composition and stage performance was cultivated with considerable ardour by the artistic geniuses of Orissa in the reigns of the Surjya-Vansi emperors—Kapilendra Deb, Purusotam Deb, and Prataprudra Deb when dramas in both Sanskrit and Prakrit were composed and staged in the temple of Lord Jagannath. But Kapilendra Deb himself deviated from the traditional past and, instead of using old Prakrit only, used the Oriya language for his drama,

Parsuram Vyayoga (a "Vyayoga" is a type of drama, the 6th among the ten Rupakas, dealt with in the "Dasa Rupaka" and other works on Sanskrit dramaturgy). Although Kapilendra Deb's contribution was still insignificent, as a bold challenge to traditional methods it marked a turning point in Oriya drama. The Surya-Vansi emperors also encouraged their soldiers to stage in peace time significant events of their expeditions of conquest. Thus, from what may be called pantomime or mimicry, artistic taste grew up in the army, which in turn led to the staging of plays on historical themes in their respective villages when the soldiers retired from the army or went home after auxiliary service.

In the middle of the 18th century, a drama called *Gauri Harana* was written and staged at Puri during the reign of Birakishore Deb I. The playwright inserted Hindi songs into the play, probably to please the Marhattas who were then rulers in Orissa. The year 1834 A.D. witnessed the production of another play, *Padmabati Haran,* by one Khadga Prasad of Dhenkanal. Raghunath Paricha and Jagamohan Lalla are two other conspicuous names in the history of dramatic authorship. Sri Paricha's *Gopinath Ballav Natak* was published in 1868. A peculiar feature of this drama is that it contains many slokas in Sanskrit metre but the language is Oriya. Jagamohan's *Balaji Natak* published in 1877 and directed against the use of intoxicating drugs had a social purpose also. Thus, the way was paved for the rise of newer and more advanced types of drama by 1880 A.D.

Then came the second stage with Ramsankar Ray, the father of modern Oriya drama. With opportunities of studying Shakespeare plays and possessing a thorough knowledge of the principles of Indian drama, modern authors wrote plays, in the true sense of modern representation, in blank verse. In addition to two farces and two lyrical dramas, Ramasankar has written ten regular dramas. The prologue of *Kanchikaveri* is completely eastern in technique. Among the contemporaries of Ramsankar Ray, Padmanava Narayan Deb, Radhamohan Rajendra Deb, Kampal Mishra and Bhikaricharan Patnaik closely followed the new technique of dramatic creation.

Mention may here be made of the 'Leelas', the 'Suangas'

and *jatras* which have been the most popular dramatic entertainments in the past three centuries. Modern Oriya drama, however, dates from the last quarter of the 19th century when it flourished in the form of " Rama Leela ", " Bharat Leela ", " Pala ", *i.e.*, open air performances depicting scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as from mythological and historical sources.

The next and third stage of Oriya drama was reached with the contribution of Pandit Godavaris Mishra and Natya Samrat Aswini Kumar Ghosh. The latter began with epical themes but gradually turned his attention to social, historical, and biographical topics. The influence of Ibsen and Freud may be traced in his *Konarka* and *Abhinaya* respectively. These two dramatists completely broke away from the tradition of beginning a play with a prologue and interspersing it with cheap humour. Most of their plays were staged by the Radha Krishna Theatre party of the Balanga district of Puri, which after the death of its proprietor, Shri Banamali Pati, was renamed the Banamali Art Theatre, the only one of its kind at that time. This group broke up between 1928-1930.

The current trend of dramatic writing is credited to Natyacharya Kali Charan Patnaik who began his career as an organiser of a Rasa party and as a composer of lyrical dramas. But now his dramatic genius has manifested itself in more than a dozen plays. A musician as well as a poet, he is a competent stage director and was the first to build a permanent stage, the " Orissa Theatres ", in the capital town of the State giving regular performances throughout the year.

At present, anybody who is well known as an actor, is a product either of the Art Theatre or the Orissa Theatres. Another permanent professional group is the Annapurna Theatre which has now split into two, one touring the different parts of Orissa while the other has settled down in Cuttack with a fully equipped stage. The professional artists have organised themselves into a union and been able to build another well-equipped permanent stage—the 'Janata Rangamancha.'.

In recent years the dramatists have turned their attention

more and more to important social problems. Some dramatists have also followed John Galsworthy in writing satirical plays on political problems.

Now there are two regular theatres in Cuttack which put plays on their boards daily throughout the year.

Innumerable dramatic performances, both professional and amateur, can now be seen and enjoyed and scores of one-act plays and translations of Sanskrit, English, and Telegu dramas have, in recent years, added to the variety of Oriya drama.

PUNJABI DRAMA

Mohan Singh

Mediaeval Punjab shared the same Sanskrit cultural and literary heritage as the rest of India, only to it was added a greater measure of Persian and Islamic influence. The following words between them embody the history of mediaeval and modern Punjabi drama: Natak, Chetak, Ras, Lila, Khel, (Swang) Sang; Bhand, Bhagtia, Ra, Dhadi, Mirasi, Rang, Bazi, Tamasha, Naqal, the last five being Persian. Natak is serious drama dealing with love, war, religion, court intrigue, and mythology; Chetak is comedy, frivolity play, amusing performance to which a dash of miracle is added; Ras is confined to the enactment of scenes from the life of Sri Krishna, as Lila is limited to the representation of stories from the *Ramayana*; Sang is mimicry, burlesque, satire, farce, lampoon, social in nature, is never written and is performed by wandering Bhands, Bhagtias and Dhadis, a common synonym being Naqal, in Persian; Tamasha is a general Persian term for any kind of performance. The performers of Naqal and Sang are called Naqalias and Swangis. Ra and Dhadi are equivalent to Rajasthani Bhatt. They are poets who recite heroic family records in verse and who are usually attached to particular castes, or groups of families of the same caste. Kanjars and Pernis are roving dancers and singers who enact suitable scenes as background for their dances and songs.

The Sanskrit classical conception of the world being a play of Sakti, Prakriti or Maya is fully echoed by our first mediaeval poets, who use almost all the words mentioned above. Guru Nanak Deva (1469-1538) says:

The One Great Juggler (Bazigar) has staged his play (Bazi); myriads are the parts He is getting acted. When He winds up this Great Display (Swang) of 'Many-ness,' He is one (Ekangkara) again.

The Lord Creator (Karta) has staged this play (Khel). In Brindaban did He, as Krishna, act His Colourful drama

(Rang).

The Great Nat (God) has started Acting (Sang) in this playground (Bazi) called the Samsara.

I, Dhadi (minstrel), sing Adesa to the Creator.

Dancing and tumbling is for the satisfaction of the mind.

The followers harp and the leaders dance ; the dancers move their feet, move their heads ; the dust raised by their feet settles on their heads. The masses witness it, laugh wholeheartedly, and return to their homes happy. It is all bread earning ; some performers even go to the extent of striking the floor with their bodies. The Gopis sing, Krishna sings, Sita and Rama sing.

Guru Arjan Deva (1565-1606) says:

We hear the Nat (actor) on the stage (akhara) of the theatre (Natik) sing ; but our mind attains no peace.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) sings:

I am a servant of the Supreme Person (Parama Purusa) ; I have come to witness this World-Play (Jagat-Tamasha).

That Transcendent Player plays countless parts and at the end He is One, as one He is before the Play (Khel).

All this is the Play (Tamasha) of Him as Time.

This conception makes every being an actor who plays his allotted part, and every act a destined activity in the universal economy and order ; it does not take away the dignity and significance of the actor and the part ; in fact it makes it a duty and a privilege for every one to play his part selflessly and well. With this conception in the background, drama, whether ceremonial or literary, became an imitation of the Divine play, an imperative duty of man, a glorification of God, an act of self-knowing and God-knowing ; all drama was, again, indirectly enjoined to be comprehensive ; the laws of drama were to be the same as the laws of the universe, no unjust, meaningless tragedy, everything directed towards a good end, all parts interdependent and co-operative, all allegorical and symbolic of Truth.

There seems to be a universality about the historical and psychological growth and development of drama, which originates as dramatic or narrative (romantic-heroic) poetry sung by minstrels, who not only recite poetry but act

it, striking sympathetic chords in the hearts of the listeners. Such minstrels in the Punjab have been wandering Jogis, or Brahmana Katha reciters. The earliest story poetised dramatically has been that of Puran, the elder son of King Salivahana, who defeated Vikramaditya of Ujjain in the seventh or eighth century. Purȧn finally became a Jogi of the Kanpata order of Gorakhnath. The story of Puran was exported and those of two other similar Jogis, Bharthri and Gopichand, were imported. The story of Rasalu, our king Arthur, the younger brother of Puran, was added and all together formed the Cycle of the Jogi Legends. Material for a second Cycle was drawn from the *Rzmzyana.* The Punjab tradition is that both Lava and Kusha, the sons of Rama, were born in the Punjab, which was later the scene of a battle between the father and the sons. This battle was also put into verse and recited. The pattern of such poetic dialogue is a double one, being made up of speeches, usually by contrasting protagonists with conflicting viewpoints and interests. The Sanskrit Vidushaka or the Clown, the Court Jester, and the Greek Chorus are also woven in.

This tradition of dramatic poetry for public recital befcre the multitude reached its culmination in Hir-Ranjha (1723 A.D.) by Waris, who is himself the Chorus and whose Saihti is the Clown. Even today the recital of Hir is a public dramatic festival, which celebrates love and pokes fun at half-a-dozen social figures and institutions. Such poetry continues to be written and thé last and best performance was *Puran* by Kalidas of Gujranwala (1865-1944 A. D.). Even earlier the word Natak had come to be used. The Punjab had not forgotten the *Ramayana,* which was drawn upon by Hirdai Ram for his *Hunuman Natak* (1630 A. D.); it was still dramatic poetry or opera, not prose drama. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 A. D.) called his verse autobiography, *Bachittra Natak,* showing his awareness of the fact that the fundamental basis of all drama is conflict. Some time after Guru Gobind Singh, the famous Sanskrit drama, *Prabodha-Chandrodaya,* a morality play, was done into Punjab *Hindwi* by the famous Punjabi poet, Gulab Singh under the name of *Prabodh Chandra Natak* (1789). Guru Gobind Singh had worked out this type of morality in his long poetical work, *Dialogue between Paras Nath and Machhandar Nath*

which describes dramatically the battle between the armies of *Discrimination* and of *Non-Discrimination.* All the characters bear symbolic or allegorical names.

Our most common and most popular roving players are the Bhands, who wander about in twos and carry their band (dhol) and the leather flap with them. They usually haunt fairs, or visit homes where a boy has been born, or a marriage is about to take place. The wit and humour, the dramatic quality, the linguistic excellence they display is the Punjab's pride. Their performances are unforgettable; although unlettered, they have the keenest sense of humour, and provide a running commentary for the public on all matters of moment, selecting their targets from every possible field including the political, the social, and the religious.

The other set of roving players are the Ras Dharias and Ram-Lila-wallahs. They use prose that is more Hindi than Punjabi ; most of them come from Rajasthan and U. P. We have also the Tamashas of wooden dolls staged by Putliwallahs.

It was towards the end of the 19th century that original prose dramas were written ; one example is *Sharab-Kaur* (Lady Wine) by Dr Charan Singh, whose son Bhai Vir Singh (b. 1872) later wrote another, similarly allegorical play, *Raja Lakhdata Singh* (King Liberal) ; another really good acting and effective play by Gurbakhsh Singh called *Manmohan Singh* (1912) depicts the slow moral, financial, and social ruin of a rich Sikh landlord who develops evil habits and keeps bad company. Then some translations from Shakespeare (*Othello*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*) and Kalidasa (*Sakuntala and Vikamorvasi*) were made. In 1925 the first (original) four Punjabi problem plays were written in Punjabi prose by Dr Mohan Singh (b. 1899) ; they were *Paradise to Let*, *Hunger*, *Guru* and *The Disciple.* In 1929 Dr Singh translated a modern English problem play in prose, called *The Ghost.* A little later he translated five more one-act plays, one from English by Lord Dunsey, and four from Hindi, by Govinda Vallabha Pant, D. D. Bhaskar and Prof. Avasthi.

In 1935 Prof. Baldev Singh translated two plays from the Persian, *Wazir-Khan-Lankran* and *Hakim Nabatat.*

By the early thirties we had the following full length plays in prose :

Maharaja Ranjit Singh and *Dido Jamwal* by the late Kirpa Sagar (1879-1936), a clerk in the Punjab University and formerly a teacher ; *Chandrahari*, *Damni*, *Mundri Chhal* and *Nar Naveli* by Bawa Budh Singh (1878-1931), an engineer ; *Nur Jahan* by Balwant Singh, a teacher ; *Dulhan*, *Subhadra*, *Lilli Da Viah* and *Var Ghar* by I. C. Nanda, a college Lecturer ; *Hir Syal* by the late Firoz Din Sharaf, a renowned Punjabi lyric poet ; and *Munde Da Mull* and *Dehati Talwar* (The Rural Sword) by Mr. Joshua Fazal Din (b. 1903), a Christian advocate of Lyalpur.

The Punjabi stage may be said to have been born in 1913 through the efforts of Mrs. Norah Richards, wife of Prof. Richards, Professor of English at Dyal Singh College, and later at Islamia College, Lahore, and her husband's pupil, Mr Ishwar Chander Nanda (B. 1892). The first prose play, written by Nanda and staged at the Dyal Singh College, Lahore, was *Dulhan* (The Bride). Mr. Nanda and Mr. Murli Dhar Mehta acted in it and acted most fittingly. The idea of a Punjabi theatre remained dormant till 1937 when it was revived but it could only be worked by Colleges or by College groups. Even today there is no Punjabi theatre hall in any city of the Punjab. Either College halls or Y.M.C.A. halls are used, or such buildings as the State Publicity Department can commandeer through its influence to stage propaganda plays.

From 1935 to 1947, there was a regular, though scanty output, of plays, partly because the writers had nothing to do with the stage, and partly because there were no responsible performers. Very few of these plays were written with a view to their being acted. Almost all these plays were slight, they lacked form, were topical in theme and facile in treatment. Nevertheless, because they exploited interesting situations and employed racy Punjabi language, they have delighted audiences and popularised the idea of a more extensive working of the rich mine of vital Punjabi idiom. Almost all these plays are without song or dance ; very few indeed have biting humour or spiritual profundity. And yet for sheer topicality, including topical progressive ideas they have definitely advanced the cause of drama. We have said 'slight' and the explanation is that 70 per cent of the plays since 1935 have been one-act plays, which

demand much less creativeness. In fact, more often than not they suggest adaptation or derivation, rather than sustained originality.

The first systematic attempt to create a Punjabi stage was made at Delhi in 1949, with the founding of the Punjabi Theatre by G. S. Khosla. Led by him, a few amateurs, who had actively participated in acting and production for some years in Lahore before partition and later continued at Delhi, formed themselves into a new society and entered three one-act plays, *Do Annhe* and *Pichhal Pairi* by Balwant Gargi, and *Baqi Pher* by G. S. Khosla, for a Drama Festival, which included a dozen plays in different languages.

The production of Punjabi plays in Delhi and elsewhere had been sporadic before. A few months earlier, G. S. Khosla's *Be-Ghare* was produced by him under the aegis of the Little Theatre Group, established under his chairmanship at Lahore before partition. The play went home with the audience by virtue of its human realism and its documentary character, and thus broke ground for the staging of plays in the Punjabi language in India's metropolis. The reception given to it showed that a vast Punjabi audience eagerly awaited Punjabi drama on the capital's stage.

The first effort of the Punjabi Theatre therefore filled a much felt need and met with quick response from lovers of the theatre. The circle of the Punjabi Theatre gradually expanded and in less than two years it became one of the most active of the amateur theatrical groups, not only in Delhi but in the whole of India. The Theatre's representatives took part in the first All-India Theatre Convention held at Bombay in 1951, under the Chairmanship of India's leading actor, Prithvi Raj Kapur. Since then, representatives of the Punjabi Theatre have occupied an important place on the Governing Body of the Bharatiya Natya Sangha (Theatre Centre India). Through this body, the Punjabi Theatre is linked on the one hand with the Delhi Natya Sangha (Delhi State Centre), of which G. S. Khosla, the Chairman of the Punjabi Theatre, is a Vice-President, and on the other with the International Theatre Institute, a UNESCO organisation. Mr. Khosla is also the Indian correspondent of "World Theatre", the organ of the International Theatre

Institute.

The forte of the Punjabi Theatre has been the one-act play, and has truly represented the Punjabi drama of today, for it is in the short one-act play that it has excelled. The Punjabi Theatre's repertoire has over a dozen one-act plays which include Ishwar Chander Nanda's *Jinn* and *Be-iman*, G. S. Khosla's *Be-Ghare*, *Baqi-Pher*, *Jutian da Jora*, *Murde da Rashan*, and *Har*, Balwant Gargi's *Do Annhe* and *Pichhal Pairi*, and Harcharan Singh's *Man dian Man wich.* All these plays have been presented on the Delhi stage and some repeated more than once.

The one-act plays presented by the Punjabi Theatre are built round contemporary life and draw their inspiration from such themes as the aftermath of partition, beliefs and superstitions embedded in human nature, and jealousies and inhibitions caused by sex hunger. Khosla's plays also bring within their sweep caustic comments and satire on current social and political institutions, and snapshots of life in India's capital.

Among the full length plays brought to life on the stage by the Punjabi Theatre are *Dosh* by Harcharan Singh, *Buhe-Baithi Dhi* by Khosla and an adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion. Dosh* depicts the struggle and misery of an innocent woman accused of sin and spurned by a callous social order. It is a play with much popular appeal and Harcharan Singh's handling is competent. *Buhe Baithi Dhi* deals with the institution of marriage undergoing a fundamental change under the impact of western influence and portrays how persons with new-fangled ideas, in trying to make concessions to a time-honoured institution, land themselves and others in trouble. The final decision of an independent heroine, somewhat after the manner of a truly Punjabi maiden, buxom, debonair and self-reliant, that she will not go through with the marriage, is like a bombshell bringing the play to a close, which, true, to life, lacks finality.

During the first three years the Punjabi Theatre developed rapidly. A branch was established at Simla in 1951 through the efforts of Mr. B. S. Bawa, who collected a circle of enthusiasts that had already devoted much of their time and energy to the stage. The Simla Group has staged, apart from Khosla's *Murde da Rashan*, two one-act and one full length play, all

adaptations. These are *Bandar da Panja* (Monkey's Paw), *Sugna* and *Ret te Patthar*, the last having been rendered into Punjabi by Amrik Singh. A branch in Jullundur was formed recently and is at present working on a new four-act play by Khosla.

The Punjabi Theatre has produced some outstanding amateur artists. Mr. Karuna Sagar Hoon and his daughter Sudha, who have made their mark on the capital's stage, were first discovered by Khosla when he presented the Punjabi Theatre's first production in 1949. Satwant Rajinder Singh, Manorama Khosla, Darshan Duggal, Sumitra Khosla, and Pal have filled important women's roles with distinction, and R. G. Anand, who has now made a name for himself as an actor, producer and playwright, first found his feet on the stage under the aegis of the Punjabi Theatre.

In the field of the Children's Theatre an important contribution was made by the Punjabi Theatre in 1951, when three short plays, *Shamu da Lela*, *Sone di Chati* and *Khokha Vaid*, were staged and seven performances given. These plays were the first serious attempts at establishing a children's theatre in the capital, and one of the first in India. Of the three alternatives, namely, the world of fantasy and make-believe, children's own life and environment, and simple and instructive themes from adult life, the Punjabi Theatre preferred the last, as it was believed that it could not only be used as a vehicle for fostering conduct of the right type among children, but, what is more important, could also satisfy their innate urge to grow and to behave like grown-ups.

An important contribution made by the Punjabi Theatre to the cultural life of India's capital was the tableaux prepared for the Republic Day Pageants for three successive years. The first was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Darbar, carried out true to historical detail, as collected from contemporary works and illustrations. The next tableau depicted "A scene from the Rural Life of the Punjab" and the third was "A Punjabi Bride" both having to fit into the larger picture of contemporary India, as laid down by the Government for these national pageants.

A word about radio plays. Mr. K. S. Duggal, an employee of All India Radio, has carefully studied the technique of this new dramatic form and has so far given us about a dozen

plays, which have repeatedly been broadcast from Lahore, Jullundur and New Delhi. They include : *The Beggar* (*Bhikhari*); *Singing Punjab* (*Gaunda Punjab*), *Young* (*Jawan Jahan*)—both musical features ; *Leavings of the Dinner Table* (*Joothe Tukre*) ; *God, Send us Rain* (*Allah Megh de*). Some of his plays, *The Lamp Goes Out* (*Dia Bujh Gaya*), *Old Bottles* (*Puranian Botlan*), and *Sweet Water* (*Mittha Pani*), all full length plays, have been successfully staged also.

Another writer whose humorous skits and short satires have won appreciation from AIR listeners as well as from literary critics is Gurnam Singh Tir of Moga, a press correspondent by profession.

To complete the account of the Punjabi repertory, mention has to be made of Prof. Gurdial Singh Phull (*b.* 1911) of Amritsar whose full length play *Man the Rational* (*Admi di Aql*) and *The Collegiate* (*Kaljgiate*) and one-act plays, *Trailer*, *Leeches*, *Crane*, *Mantra*, *The Pile of Wheat*, have been much applauded; of Prof. Sant Singh Sekhon, who has been able to use his socialistic leanings to good effect in his full length play, *One Sunday* (*Ik Aitwar*) and *Destiny* (*Bhavi*), and one-act plays, *The Son* (*Puttar*), *The Strike* (*Hartal*), *Mahatma*, acted at Amritsar; and Gurbakhsh Singh, the editor of the Punjabi monthly *Preet Lari*, whose plays are mostly romantic.

Thus, from 1937, I. C. Nanda, Harcharan Singh, Joshua Fazal Din, Gurdial Singh Phull, Balwant Gargi, Gurdial Singh Khosla, K. S. Duggal, B. S. Bawa, Amrik Singh, Gurnam Singh, Balbir Singh, Nanak Singh, R. L. Ahuja have between them considerably enriched Punjabi drama and the theatre, creating among the public a genuine taste for it and a persistent demand for its gratification. One can look at the scene with some satisfaction and look forward with optimism.

TAMIL DRAMA

V. C. Gopalratnam

Tamil drama today is a well established and flourishing art, but sixty years ago, it was in a very rudimentary stage and it is only in the course of the last six decades that Tamil drama has reached its present position. Its development has not been steady and continuous but marked by ups and downs.

One of the three varieties of the classical Tamil language was 'Nataka Thamizh', the other two being 'Iyal Thamizh' and 'Isai Thamizh'. That these three kinds of Tamil flourished in the days of the ancient Tamil sangams can be assumed without question. But while we have many excellent works in 'Iyal Thamizh' of those and succeeding days—most of them in their pristine purity,—we have very few works or even fragments of the other two varieties. The three varieties of Tamil merely mean "Drama Tamil", "Prose and Poetry Tamil" and "Music Tamil". That in those days it was recognised that the language to be employed in each of the said types of literature could not be the same but should vary in accordance with the requirements and purposes of each is more than clear and needs no repetition. Anyhow, the ıact remains that whatever Tamil drama or dramatic works might have existed and flourished in the ancient days, not a vestige of it remained or was even remembered 70 years ago so as to constitute a separate department of art to be called the "Tamil Stage" or 'Tamil Drama'.

In the eighties and nineties of the last century a drama in the Tamil country was something to be looked down upon not only for its lack of any intrinsic value but for the lack of character, respectability, and purity in those who were connected with it. For a multitude of reasons no parent in any decent family would willingly allow a member of his family of any age or sex to see a play. The performance used to take place on the outskirts of the village on what is known as the "Kalathumedu" or threshing floor of the community. The stage was generally raised a few inches above ground which served as the auditorium.

The illumination or lighting was of the most primitive kind, produced by one or two big salvers of oil containing a thick wick which produced little light and a great deal of smoke. The auditorium was simply Mother Earth, there was no division of class or comfort, everybody squatted in a crowd and endured the discomfort as best he could. It was mainly this close physical contact that roused the opposition of better class people and prevented them from attending such performances. In towns where no threshing floor was available the venue was always a vacant plot, sometimes covered, sometimes not, in a crowded quarter in insanitary and evil-smelling slums.

The performance invariably took place at night, beginning at about 9 or 10 p. m., after the day's work and continuing till dawn. To attend a performance inevitably meant the loss of a night's sleep.

As for the quality of the performance, it is difficult to conceive of anything more crude and primitive. The acting, too, was crude. Anger or displeasure always meant shouting at the top of one's voice with little attempt at modulation. Sorrow invariably involved the adopting of a falsetto whining tone which was expected to draw tears from the audience. No serious attempt was made to adopt suitable costumes. Old tawdry and often dirty finery served to clothe the king and queen while the rest of the cast were all clothed in their everyday garb. The make-up was the same for every actor, which was a mixture of turmeric and some cosmetic or other like "aritharam". This produced a bright yellow complexion on the face with moustaches and beards of required sizes and shapes painted with charcoal powder mixed with oil. It was the face alone which was made up, the neck, the arms and the rest of the body retaining their natural colour. The eyes were blackened with ash mixed with oil to form a soft paste.

The plot never presented difficulties. Almost invariably the story would be some incident taken from the Puranic setting or from a purely Puranic theme and rendered into mixed verse and prose by some writer. The total stock of plots or themes was very limited, not perhaps exceeding a dozen, of which the most oft-repeated and popular would be *Harichandra*, *Kovalan*,

Savitri and Satyavan, *Ramanatakam*, *Draupadi Vastrapaharanam*. On rare occasions, a social play like *Dambachari Vilasam* was also produced. There was always plenty of music to be sung by almost every character (including servants) and no attempt was ever made by the actor to blend the prose and music into a harmonious whole. Most of the songs would be well known to every member of the audience and were invariably sung at the right moment. The approved method of rendering songs would be to go and stand in front of the harmonium placed to one side of the stage and call for the base to be sounded by the harmonist and, after adjusting the pitch and testing the voice, sing one bar of the song and stop and then the same would be repeated by the harmonist and/or others as a kind of accompaniment or chorus. Every bar had to be sung separately and repeated by the accompaniment, while during this time, the other actor who was supposed to participate in the incident might have gone into the green room for a drink and would come back before the end of the song.

There was absolutely no text of the speaking parts. Having no written script, there was no need for a prompter. The story was always well known ; the songs acted as guides or well placed buoys at intervals, and whatever was to come in between was left to the actor to fill with such prose as came to his lips. The general level of education of these actors being low, one could not expect any literary effort on their part in the dialogue except the repetition of some well known Tamil proverbs or familiar gag, generally obscene or bordering on the obscene.

To turn to the scenes and scenery, the only embellishment of the stage was a curtain between the actors and the audience and no further attempt was made to provide other scenic arrangements.

The level of production on the whole was thus most primitive and crude. The result was that right up to the end of the century no amateur could be found to interest himself in any manner in Tamil drama. It was entirely in the hands of professionals drawn from the lowest ranks of society. The great prejudice in the popular mind against the atmosphere of the drama and all persons engaged in it cannot be said to have been wholly unjustified.

If the credit for removing the universal prejudice against Tamil drama and everything connected with it can go to any one, it is to the amateur who stepped into the field in the closing decade of the 19th century and interested himself in various capacities as author, writer, artist, producer, etc. No history of the development of Tamil drama in South India would be complete without a reference to the one institution which pledged itself to the nursing and growth of dramatic art and started on the Herculean task of cleaning the Augean stables by removing the great prejudice in the popular mind and the internal impurities in the practice of the art itself. That association was the Suguna Vilasa Sabha which was brought into existence about 65 years ago by a band of bold and enterprising young men of good families with high literary accomplishments to their credit. Thanks to the activities of the Sabha, within the short space of ten years, the amateur stage was well established and the art of drama began to flourish. Fortunately, the leader of this band of young men is still alive. Though he has attained a very venerable age and already given to the Tamilians nearly a hundred plays of his own, yet he is still active with his pen. He is Rao Bahadur P. Sambanda Mudaliar, now in his eighties, a magnificent actor himself and a peerless conductor and teacher. Among other qualities he has a huge store of personal magnetism and drive and a score or more of indomitable young amateurs gathered round him. Thus, thanks to the activities of this man and his fellow workers, the Tamil stage proper came into being. Tamil dramas began to be produced according to a plan satisfying the requirements of a proper stage ; written texts were adhered to and attempts made to produce the effects intended by the author of the play. Rehearsals became a necessity and a regular feature, and a high standard was thereby ensured for the final production on the stage. A sense of discipline came to be inculcated and success was invariably achieved. In the course of the first 25 or 30 years of the existence of the Sabha, both by reason of work in the metropolis of Madras and the tours undertaken in the country, even in far-off Ceylon and Travancore, the amateur stage was built up and numerous other Associations devoted to the dramatic art began to be formed in Tamilnad, in fact wherever Tamilians lived or foregathered.

It is no exaggeration to say that the amateur stage almost completely succeeded in driving out what had been parading as "professional drama", with all its objectionable features. By the year 1925 it became a very rare occurrence for a dramatic performance in Tamil on the old lines to be produced. On the other hand, some of the better type of producers of the professional drama very promptly began to imitate the methods of production employed by the amateurs and started and maintained dramatic troupes or "companies" conducted on approved lines. They were largely what were known as "Boys' Companies" in which most of the actors were young boys below the age of 16 or 17 who were naturally more amenable to discipline than grown-up people and who were made to speak and act according to the the text and teaching of the producer and conductor. The owners or managers of such troupes or "companies", being themselves men of good character and business acumen, were extremely vigilant in maintaining a very high moral tone and did not allow any obscenity or lewdness to creep in among the young actors and into the performance itself.

Then came the new menace to the dramatic art—the "Silver screen". Being new and having several advantages over the stage in producing effects, the screen easily began to supplant the stage not only by capturing the support and loyalty of the audience, but also by securing the services of the artists and actors themselves. Thus, a very large number of the amateurs who had been engaged in staging and producing Tamil dramas yielded to the glamour of the screen and the result was the gradual desertion of the votaries of the dramatic art to the screen.

A period of acute economic distress synchronised with this development and stood in the way of profitable production of the stage drama. The rise in prices, taxation by the State and the high cost of living all helped to kill dramatic activity and by 1940 its decline in the South was complete.

With independence, however, drama experienced a revival. Already, the people who had rushed headlong to make pictures were gradually disillusioned. A large number of artists who had attained varying degrees of success on the Tamil screen began to take a renewed interest in the stage and to act in plays. At the same time, thanks to the efforts of a few leading figures con-

nected with drama, the Government of Madras exempted stage performances from the entertainment tax. A third lucky circumstance was the tremendous success attained by certain enthusiasts in their experiments with open air dramas, the stage being used for mere acoustic and other purposes. This experiment showed that good dramatic performances were capable of attracting thousands of people and had not lost their grip on the multitudes.

Having turned the corner, Tamil drama made rapid progress and has practically recovered most of the lost ground within the last decade, thereby attaining a pre-eminent position in South India. More than anything else, it is a gratifying fact that the professional element has played a very large part in the recovery and resuscitation of the dramatic art, so much so that today for the first time in the history of the art the professional theatre has attained a very high level of excellence. It has outstripped the amateur theatre in certain respects, and achieved great fame and distinction. With the benevolent support of the Government, there is every hope now of still further development and improvement of Tamil drama.

Before closing, I wish to sound a note of warning. Though to some extent the revival of the dramatic art has been assisted by methods borrowed from the film, those who have started working in the field of Tamil drama should be careful not to rely increasingly on the film technique. This would create a hybrid monster which would possess all the defects of both, without having the merits of either. The two cannot blend and it is high time that people realised it.

There is another danger which should be avoided—the danger of mixing the theatre with politics or propaganda. This has been done and has already made considerable havoc in Tamil drama.

TELUGU DRAMA

K. V. Gopalaswamy

Telugu, Tenugu and Andhra are three different terms used to denote the same language. While there is ample evidence that Telugu as a spoken language was known to have existed in 73 B. C., the date given as beginning the rule of the Satakarni dynasty, the earliest document available to us in the Telugu script is the Nandamapundi Sasana of 1053 A. D. The earliest forms of Telugu literature did not include drama. Since Sanskrit drama started on its downward path early in the 11th century A. D. and disappeared completely by the middle of the 13th, its influence on Telugu drama may be said to be almost negligible.

The origin of early Telugu drama is to be found instead in *Desi-Kavita* or folk-lore The earliest forms of entertainment in Telugu Nadu were, at first, the *Purana-Kalakshepamu* at the *Grama-Chavadi* and the *Bhajana*, a form of congregational worship expressed in song and dance. Later, the more elaborate and better planned *Padas* and *Geyakavyas* held the field. These were followed by *Bhagavatamu* or *Bhamakalapamu*, poetically narrated stories of episodes from Sri Krishna's life, interpreted in dance accompanied by music. About the same period the shadow play which had already eclipsed Sanskrit drama, made its appearance in the South as the *Telugu Puppet Show* and became the precursor of early Telugu drama, which was written and flourished in the form of *Yakshaganams* and *Veedhinatakams*, the scripts of many of which may be found in the Tanjore library and the Madras Oriental Library. These *Yakshaganams* and *Veedhinatakams*, though written in very simple language, are in local dialect and seem to have catered only for the local people.

It was only during the last quarter of the 19th century that the Telugu theatre, like the theatres of the rest of India, came into being, mainly as a result of the indirect influence of the European theatre through the medium of English touring companies calling at Indian ports, on their way to the

Dominions and Colonies. The cities of Bombay and Calcutta had the advantage of witnessing the performances of these mediocre touring companies, but the rest of India came to have an idea of the European drama only through the melodramatic and highly artificial renderings of the travelling "Parsi" companies.

Chitranaleeyam was the first play written in Telugu and produced during the eighties of the last century for the *Sarasa Vinodini Sabha* at Bellary by Sri Dharmavaram Krishnamacharya, the author-actor, who during the next twenty-five years wrote and produced nearly thirty plays including *Sarangadhara, Prahlada* and *Ajameela*. At about the same time, Sri Kolachalam Sreenivasa Rao wrote and produced for the *Sumanorama Sabha* at Bellary an equal number of plays which included *Rama Raju, Chandbee, Siladitya*, and *Kalidas*. Bellary may therefore be said to be the birthplace of Telugu Drama. It is also the home of the Andhra Nataka Pitamaha Krishnamacharya and his nephew, Raghava, the greatest actor of Andhra.

Theatrical companies associated with the names of talented actors and authors were formed from 1890 onwards at various other centres in Andhra. Emmaneni Hanumantha Rao Naidu, Taluri Narasinga Rao, Tanguturi Prakasam at Rajahmundry, Eemani Lakshmanaswamy and Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao at Masulipatam, Hariprasada Rao, Kopalle Hanumantha Rao and Baljepalli Lakshmikantam at Guntur were the earliest in the field. Some of the plays presented in these early years included Kandukuri Veeresalingam's *Sakuntala*, Vaddadi Subbarayudu's *Veni Samharam*, Chilakamarti Lakshminarasimham's *Gayopakhyanam* and *Narakasuravadha* and Baljepalli Lakshmikantham's *Harischandra*. Before long, Vedam Venkataraya Sastri wrote his *Prataparudriyam* and the Thirupathi Venkata Kavulu dramatised the entire *Mahabharata*. Panuganti Lakshminarasimha Rao had started writing his comedies whose value, however, was to be appreciated only in later years.

Amateurs dominated the Telugu theatre during the first twenty-five years of the century. There were many good actors on the stage at that time, but owing to the limited funds

at their disposal, very little attention was paid either to scenic design, or costume, or make-up. Before long, however, efforts were made to put the theatres on a commercial basis by giving increasing attention to the "spectacle". Thanks to the patronage of Satyavolu Gunneswara Rao and Kruthiventi Nageswara Rao at Rajahmundry, the Rajah of Mylavaram at Bezwada and Mothey Narayana Rao at Eluru, the professional theatre was launched between 1910 and 1920 and it proved a serious rival to the amateur companies, and some very talented amateur actors joined the profession. During the period of World War I (1914-18) the spectacular plays presented at Rajahmundry, Eluru and particularly at Bezwada attracted huge audiences. The income from these performances was indeed high, but the fabulous expenditure involved in producing these spectacular plays ruined the patrons, whose purse could not cope with their enthusiasm. The management of these playhouses being in the hands of persons whose taste had not been developed, their efforts did not enrich the art of the theatre.

One and only one factor saved the Telugu stage during the second decade of this century and that is the growth of acting talent. Yadavalli Suryanarayana at Bezwada, Munjuluri Krishna Rao at Eluru, D.V. Subba Rao at Masulipatam were the most prominent actors of the time. They had also the advantage of having some talented actors like Jaggaraju, Sanjeeva Rao, and Anjayya playing feminine roles. They were all professional actors and depended, with the exception of Krishna Rao, as much on their ability to act as on their capacity to recite poetry in the manner of Sri Chellapalli Venkata Sastry at Masulipatam. In addition to these, there were the amateur actors at Nellore, Doraswamy Iyyengar and Nagarja Rao who gave new interpretation to familiar roles. But Raghava of Bellary, who had no particular talent for recitation of Telugu poetry, dominated the Telugu theatre entirely by his inspired acting.

In 1919, during Divali, Gurazada Apparao's *Kanyasulkam* was presented at the V.P. Hall by the Andhra students at Madras with Govindarajula Subbarao in the role of that fascinating scamp—Gireesam. The interpretation of this role

was to become the test of acting talent in Andhra for years to come. Ramanujachari of Bezwada reached unprecedented heights as Gireesam. This play written a quarter of a century earlier became a model for the "social drama" in Telugu. Inferior authors who imitated Gurazada, however, soon discovered possibilities of making a pretty penny by pandering to low tastes. Their plays had ostentatious moral endings—a bulwark against censure. But a large proportion of the vast audiences which they had attracted were drawn not from any desire to see virtue triumph over vice, but to obtain secondary satisfaction out of scenes of drunken brawls, and promiscuous relationships, excitements they were unable to obtain by personal experience. When these scenes were over, but before the plays were finished the halls used to become nearly empty. This was the homage which virtue paid to vice. But their success was the success of decadence. In them, the shape of our future popular theatre was being forged.

During the third decade of the 20th century, which saw intensive political activity with the launching of the civil disobedience movement by Gandhiji, authors turned their talents to writing patriotic plays. Some of the plays writen in the previous decade—Srinivasa Rao's *Fall of Vijayanagar*, Vedam Venkataraya Sastry's *Prataparudriyam*, Sripada Krishnamurti Sastri's *Bobbili*, Kopparapu Subbarao's *Roshanara* were, no doubt, presented occasionally, but the production of these plays was soon banned, and the printed editions were suppressed. The Andhra students in Madras who had been producing some of these plays at benefit performances failed to find suitable substitutes and plunged themselves into direct action in the political field in preference to serving patriotic causes through art.

This period, however, saw the sprouting of the *Sri Rama Vilas Nataka Sabha* at Tenali and the budding of acting talent in Govindarajula Subbarao, Madhavapeddi Venkatramayya, Sthanam Narasimha Rao. Sanyasiraju of Samalkot, Banda Kanakalingeswararao of Eluru and Thota Venkateswararao of Masulipatam were contemporary actors of no mean ability from other centres. Amateur talents flourished once again.

Raghava presented Rajamannar's *Thappevaridi* at the

Museum Theatre, Madras, on Pongal Day 1930, a turning point in the history of Telugu drama. He proved to be a playwright of international stature and was seriously discussed and soon imitated. Secondly, the ladies who appeared in Rajamannar's play, Srimatis Madabushi Sarojini Ramachandra Rao of Hyderabad and Annapurna of Kakinada and Kommuri Padmavati at subsequent performances displayed remarkable talent. Before long Srimatis Ramathilakam, Sriranjani, Kannamba, Purnima and Rajeswari brought feminine talent to the professional stage. Soon, however, the theatre lost most of these talents to the screen.

A few interesting plays appeared in print between 1930 and 1940. No doubt, Muddukrishna's *Asokam*, Chalam's *Chitrangi* and *Sasanka*, Kaviraju's *Sambhuka Vadha* and *Khuni* and Amancherla's *Hiranyakasipu* were only new interpretations of ancient mythology, yet they illustrated new trends in play-writing. The rebellion against traditional values represented by these plays necessarily involved coming up against people who could do incalculable damage to the theatre. These plays were therefore not to be produced till the next decade and then only as experiments by those who were quite indifferent to the wrath of the gods.

During World War II (1939-45) the professionals had their innings, and the troupes of Banda, Purnima, Rajeswari and others presented old plays with plenty of poetry and gathered huge profits. The success of these professional troupes was due to a special technique of sale of tickets for so-called benefit performances adopted during the war period by coercive officials and had little to do with the quality of the performance given.

Since 1945, there has been intense activity in the Telugu Theatre. Three movements contributed to this renaissance.

I. *The Andhra Nataka Kala Parishat*

Founded at Tenali in 1929 under the guidance of Vanarasu Govindarao and Kottapalli Laxmayya, the Parishat held 19 conferences in 26 years. Competitions are held during these annual conferences and prizes are awarded for the best plays, production, actors and actresses. While the Parishat is undoubtedly the oldest association of its kind in Andhra and

has the highest prestige, it works under several limitations. It meets only once a year. Owing to lack of funds it has not been able to carry out many of its scheduled programmes. Attempts were made on two occasions to run a Theatre Magazine—a few issues appeared at irregular intervals but the venture failed.

Attempts have been made by the Kumara Raja of Vuyyur (President) and Pasala Suryachandrarao (Secretary) to widen the scope of its activities. It has succeeded in getting the entertainment tax on dramatic performances abolished. The Parishat has been recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akadami, and Sri Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao who recently toured Europe and Russia has been nominated to the Akadami as the representative of Telugu Drama. At the last Parishat, it was resolved to run a monthly magazine devoted to the art of the theatre.

For many years, the Parishat has been agitating for a Central Theatre. The obvious place for its location is Bezwada. But no step has been taken to achieve this. Between the conflicting currents of Coastal and Rayalaseema politics this important matter has been left unsettled. With the prospect of Visalandhra there might be a new orientation to the location of the Central Theatre. In the event of the formation of Visalandhra, it is obvious that the Andhra theatre should be built at Hyderabad, the future capital of Visalandhra. The Parishat has also been agitating for the establishment of an Academy. It is understood that the Government of Andhra is examining the question.

II. *The Andhra University Experimental Theatre*

Open only to the University and affiliated colleges in Andhra, this experimental theatre has come into prominence since 1943. Every year in December, at the Drama Festivals run by the Andhra University Dramatic Association in conjunction with the Andhra (now Visalandhra) Abhyudaya Utsavamulu clelebrated by the University Students' Union, some daring experiments are made with plays which could not be produced on the amateur or professional stage for technical, financial, or sentimental reasons. Careful editing of plays, intensive rehearsals and close attention to make-up, costume,

properties, scenic design, lighting, background sounds, etc., are the main features of the productions at the open air theatre at Waltair. Several affiliated colleges entering the competitions held during the festival take full advantage of the technical equipment and assistance provided by the University; and the experience gained at the University Centre is transmitted to the affiliated colleges.

One indirect effect is that on leaving the University the students trained at the experimental theatre have been able to give considerable assistance to amateur theatrical producers in various branches of the theatre requiring technical training. The result of this assistance is that the amateur theatre of Andhra today has become far superior to the professional theatre in many ways.

The idea of open air theatres is spreading quickly amongst the affiliated colleges in Andhra. Thanks to subsidies from the Government of India, several colleges have launched programmes for the construction of open air theatres. As there has already been intense activity in these colleges, the construction of these open air theatres will add considerably to the popularization of experimental drama in Andhra.

III. *The Telugu Little Theatre and the Andhra Theatres' Federation*

The T.L.T. was founded in 1947 mainly through the efforts of Kopparapu Subba Rao, and its headquarters are at Bezwada. Its objects are similar to those of the Little Theatre Movements in England and the U.S.A. The T.L.T. has built up an extensive and valuable library of technical books on the various aspects of the theatre as well as a large number of plays in Telugu and English. It has in its possession expensive electrical equipment which has been a great asset to the Telugu Theatre, since it is always at the disposal of the various theatrical productions associated with T.L.T. It has also collected valuable information on the plays published in Andhra and on the active theatrical associations in the State.

In August 1954, the A.T.F. was inaugurated at Rajahmundry, with the main object of protecting the rights and interests of artists connected with the Telugu Theatre, and of providing technical equipment and guidance to the assoiations affiliated to it. Kopparapu Subba Rao is the president and

G. Raja Rao the Secretary.

Both the T.L.T. and the A.T.F. have been working in close co-operation with each other, and both have, from their very inception, acknowledged the leadership of the Nataka Kala Parishat. As the objects of these two bodies are rather different from those of the Parishat there has been no conflict between them.

It is unfortunate, however, that the T.L.T. did not receive backing it had expected from the Amateur Associations it had tried to co-ordinate and assist. This failure is no reflection on the organizers of the T.L.T. The A.T.F., on the other hand, has been more active and has done considerable work since its inception. An attempt has been made to call a seminar, and men with knowledge of the theatre have been invited to take part in it. Owing to various unforeseen difficulties the seminar could not be held this year and had to be postponed.

Through the opportunities provided at the annual conferences of the Parishat and the drama festival of the University some excellent but previously unproduced plays by established authors like Rajamannar, Muddukrishna, Rangaram, Chalam, Kopparapu, Amancherala, Gavanu Venkata Krishna Rao and Narla were staged and the latent talents of Buchibabu, Vinjamuri Sivaram, Palagummi Padmaraju, Somanchi Yeggenna Sastri and Kondamudi Gopalaraya Sarma were brought before the footlights. Above all, with the presentation of Acharya Atreya's N.G.O. at the Parishat in 1949, the spotlight was turned on the live, heart-rending problems of the day by powerful playwrights like Anisetty, and Pinisetty, while comedy from the pen of Narasaraju, Prakhya Sreerama Murty, Korrapati Gangadharam and Korrapati Sreerama Murty gave refreshing entertainment. Most of these authors have considerable experience of the Telugu stage and its problems either as actors or as directors and therefore they are able to write plays suitable for production.

From the information gathered up to 1953 by the T.L.T. it would appear that 1,800 plays (one-act and full length included) had been published either in magazines or as books between 1939 and 1953. During the last two years there have

been further additions to these publications. In the publication of plays, the monthly and weekly Telugu magazines have been playing a very important part—particularly *Bharati*, *Andhra Jyoti*, *Jyoti*, and the Weekly editions of *Andhra Prabha* and *Andhra Patrika*. It is true that most of these published plays have little theatrical value. But, not infrequently, it has been possible to discover first rate one-act plays even in the weekly and monthly magazines. Sometimes, even when a play is published as a " Radio Play ", it is not too difficult to adapt it for production on the stage. But there has been no appreciable increase in the number of full length plays published either as serials in magazines or in book form. There have, no doubt, been a few adaptations, but original work is very limited. The effort needed to write a play, which would grip the attention of an audience for two and a half hours or more, does not appear to be in particular evidence in Andhra.

It is estimated by the T.L.T. that there are nearly 1,000 dramatic associations and over 6,000 actors in Andhra, the addresses of many of whom have been gathered and published by Pulipati Venkateswarlu. These associations are to be found in every district, and there are actors in every city, town, and village in Andhra. But there is not a single city, town or village in Andhra where one finds a theatre exclusively devoted to the presentation of stage plays ; and the rents of the cinema halls taken on hire by the dramatic companies run up to Rs. 1,000/- for a single performance. Appeals, however, are being made for the establishment of a centrally located Telugu Theatre and for the construction of municipal theatres. But the prospect is not encouraging.

Fortunately, the construction of the open air theatres in the colleges affiliated to the University is progressing rapidly. While these theatres are primarily intended for the production of plays by students, it may be possible to allow local amateur companies to use them. This question is engaging the attention of people connected with Telugu drama.

URDU DRAMA

Rajendra Nath Shaida

Urdu drama makes its first appearance towards the decline of Muslim rule in this country. In Urdu, drama came rather late. This is mostly due to the fact that drama did not exist in Persian literature, from which Urdu had by then borrowed almost all its literary forms. However, the origin of Urdu drama can be traced back to the first half of the last century. Manuscripts of Urdu plays of the pre-*Indar Sabha* period still exist in the possession of such people as Professor Masud Hasan Razavi of Lucknow. It should also be mentioned that a certain Nawaz was ordered by the Mughal king Farrukh Seer to render Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* into Urdu. But all this seems to have been literature for reading rather than plays for acting.

An important landmark in the development of Urdu drama is Amanat's *Indar Sabha* written in 1853. This is like the "ras" or "opera", all in verse and with a rich variety of metres and songs. Raja Indar and his fairies, named after the gaudy colours of their costumes, are the main characters and there is no plot worth the name. It is held that Wazid Ali Shah, the last of the Oudh rulers had directed Amanat, his court poet, to write this play which was staged in Qaisarbagh and that Wazid Ali himself played the part of Indar while women of the royal harem acted as fairies. But this has been disputed with authority. However, this much is beyond doubt, that the play was actually staged in Lucknow and its popularity inspired others also to write *Indar Sabhas*. Prominent among them is Murari Lal who shortly after Amanat produced an *Indar Sabha* of his own.

The end of Wazid Ali Shah's reign closed a chapter in the cultural life of Lucknow. Consequently, the development of drama also received a setback. The thread was picked up again by some Parsis in Bombay. Under the patronage of these pioneers of the modern stage, Urdu drama made continued progress for about half a century. The original Theatrical

Company of Pestonji Framji, the founder of the Urdu Stage, came into existence in 1870. Pestonji himself was an actor and so was Khurshidji Balliwala, the renowned comedian, who later embarked on his own venture, the Parsi Victoria Theatrical Company. The latter also toured and staged plays in a number of big towns in the country. Then came others, the Alfred, New Alfred, and so on.

It cannot be denied that these Parsi producers were motivated primarily by commercial considerations. Nevertheless, the very nature of their calling made the progress of dramatic art inevitable. At the beginning, Parsis with a knowledge of Urdu wrote the scripts, or did so with the assistance of some unknown "munshis". The credit for the authorship of the plays, staged in those early years, also went to these Parsis. This continued till 1880. The glamour of this new art had so strong an attraction that in some cases, it is believed, even Hussain Mian Zarif, himself a playwright of no mean order, published plays written by others in his own name.

After 1880, however, the Parsis openly drew upon the services of certain writers to write plays for the stage, and the actual writers were declared to be the authors. Plays were written for Pestonji's company by Raunaq Banarsi and Mian Zarif. Balliwala employed Vinayak Prasad Talib. Other companies assigned this work to various persons, prominent among them being Ahsan Lucknowi and Narain Prasad Betab (Alfred) and Agha Hashr Kashmiri (New Alfred). Later, Hashr also started a company of his own and, when it failed, wrote for the Madan.

Many plays were written one after the other by these writers. The themes which were mainly woven round traditional romantic love, chivalry, generosity and the like were derived from various sources, such as the classics, history, and legends. A number of plays of Western writers—Shakespeare and others—were also translated into Urdu, generally substituting Indian names for European characters. The translations were many but they suffered from many defects. Perhaps none of these translations suceeeded in reproducing the spirit of the originals. In many cases even the sense was not correctly

rendered. But happily no distinction was made between the sources from which the stories were derived, which were Persian and Sanskrit, Hindu and Muslim, Eastern and Western. The only consideration seems to have been that they should be of sufficient interest to the public in general. Original plays were also not lacking but their stories were mostly modelled on classical patterns.

The plays that particularly dominated the stage, apart from *Indar Sabha* and *Rustam-o-Sohrab,* were Zarif's *Bulbul-i-Bimar, Shirin Farhad, Laila Majnun* and *Hatim Tai* ; Talib's *Lail-o-Nihar, Gopi Chand* and *Harish Chand* ; Betab's *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* ; and Agha Hashr's *Shahid-i-Naz, Khwab-i-Hasti, Said-i-Hawas, Murid-i-Shak* and *Asir-i-Hirs.*

Drama as a form of literature has some peculiar characteristics. The dramatist has to say everything through his characters. He does not enjoy the advantage of a novelist of saying what he wants directly. Again, plays are primarily meant for the stage which ordinarily involves heavy expenditure. The writer, therefore, has to keep in view the requirements not only of the stage and the actors, but also of the audience, their tastes and temperaments, likes and dislikes.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the present, drama was regarded essentially as a means of entertainment. It attracted audiences through sophisticated expressions of emotion, the display of costumes and stage accomplices and tricks. The painted screens had a charm of their own. High sounding phrases, songs, and dances, not of a high order, thrilled the audience and the use of mutually rhyming phrases and verses even in ordinary dialogues was quite frequent. But all that was a historic necessity, rather an unavoidable link in the chain of development and the producer as also the writer could ignore demands of the time only at the risk of their extinction.

Naturally, therefore, Urdu plays of those days had all these characteristics, demerits one may call them. Nevertheless, they showed progressive signs of improvement in a variety of ways. At the outset, the entire plays were written in verse and the songs, strange as it may sound, used to be in Hindi. Gradually, prose replaced verse, rhyme disappeared and Urdu

songs were introduced. Talib was largely responsible for the introduction of Urdu songs. Language also improved from the view point of both standard and suitability for a given occasion. Then attention was paid to the construction of a plot. Formerly, two quite distinct plots, one main and the other humorous, used to run side by side, but later attempts were made to get them correlated and interwoven. Urdu drama is known particularly for its forceful language and brisk, witty, and spicy dialogues. Agha Hashr should be specially named in this context.

The actress, it is said, is as old as the Urdu stage itself. From their very outset theatrical companies employed dancing girls as actresses ; whatever their accomplishments might be as artists, they certainly added to stage attractions. People sometimes applauded at their very appearance. But at least once their participation in a performance created serious trouble. The Alfred Theatrical Company, probably in 1914, visited Lahore and staged Betab's *Mahabharat.* People strongly resented the fact that such girls took the parts of Rukmini and Draupadi. They refused to tolerate the representation of characters with religious sanctity by women of " questionable" morals. The result was that the Company had to abandon the show.

This is just an incident, but it also shows that the glamour of the stage could not for long make people indifferent to its evil effects on the public. A sense of social responsibility was growing both among the people and the writers. The enthusiasm created by the stage made many feel that drama could be used conveniently and profitably as a means of social reform. Subsequently, some prominent writers, even scholars with insight into contemporary social problems and missionary zeal started writings plays.

A person as prominent as Abdul Majid Daryabadi, in his play " *Zood Pasheman,* attacked the evils of early marriage. Abdul Halim Sharar wrote *Mewai Talkh* to expose the rigidity of the purdah system. Similarly, Pandit Kaifi came out with *Rajdulari* and *Murari Doda* to suggest social reform.

Plays were also written with political themes. The first of this category is perhaps *Albert Bill,* written by Umrao Ali in

1893. Krishna Chand Zeba's *Zakhmi Punjab* is notable for drawing a pathetic picture of that province, so much so that, in view of the likely effect of this play on the public, the Government considered it necessary to confiscate it. Maulvi Zafar Ali went a step forward. Transcending national boundaries in his *Rus Japan* he dealt with the tussle between the two countries.

Evidently, social and political plays were breaking new ground. They were the creations of people of high literary stature.

Although Urdu drama, as we have seen, made considerable progress on the whole, by the end of the first quarter of this century, it cannot be denied that certain aspects of the drama failed to receive due attention. Action and conflict which are basic conditions which make a play successful were mostly lacking. Characterization also was given little consideration. Outbursts of characters with uncommon emotions often deteriorated into hollow sentimentalism. They were not endowed with ideals of wide social import. Their mental conflicts seldom showed any depth of precision on the part of the writers. All this naturally failed to make a character move like a living figure and there was hardly any illusion of reality about it.

An exception to the rule was probably "Anarkali" by Imtiaz Ali Taj. He portrayed beautifully life in the Moghul palace and developed the character of the heroine in such an artistic manner that the reader's attention was captivated to the end.

The advent of the cinema in the country adversely affected the stage. The facilities for production, inherent in the new industry, robbed the dramatic companies of many of their attractions. They sprang up almost all over the country. The theatre and the cinema could, for some time, go on simultaneously. Some theatres even made frantic efforts to preserve their independent existence but met with little success. Most of the companies ultimately closed down. Individuals even went over to film production. Theatrical mandlis and minor companies here and there, of course, remained, but when talkies came, conditions for the drama did not improve. At first, some films were produced as stage-plays but subsequently

the difference of technique between the two was realised and writing for the film took an independent course. Some prominent Urdu writers were then attracted by the talkies. They wrote stories, dialogues, and songs for them. But none can perhaps claim singly the credit of writing for any film completely and of not submitting to the suggestions of the producers at different stages. In the Film Industry, the voice of the producer and not that of the script writer must predominate.

The decline of the stage was partly compensated for by the coming in of the one-act play. Like the modern stage it was taken from the West, where it arose out of the requirements of the industrial age. Celebrated fiction writers of that period started writing one-act plays. These plays could not be staged like the full length plays but students and dramatic clubs sometimes utilised them. Otherwise they appeared mostly in literary magazines or were available in collections. As time passed some of these writers acquired a deep insight into the problems of life and the working of the human mind, as a study of the one-act plays in Urdu will show. Prominent writers of such plays often tried to bring out the effect of environment on their characters and successfully portrayed emotional conflicts. Some of these one-act plays are good psychological studies. Their craftsmanship in the construction of plots and characterization is equally remarkable. They observed the three unities to create the required effects.

With the introduction of broadcasting in 1935, fresh opportunities came the way of these writers. It furnished a new stage with undreamt of possibilities. The radio play did not require a large stage, an army of actors and other things. It did not even impose the restriction of the unities. Much could be managed through sound effects. Its appeal was to the ear only. Writing radio dramas, therefore, needed a new technique and the writers of one-act plays also tried to write them. Radio dramatists made experiments and produced monologues, features, and documentaries to suit varied requirements. The themes, of course, were not in any way different from those of the one-act plays.

Among those who wrote one-act and radio plays with success and distinction are Upendranath Ashk, Krishna

Chandra, Saadat Hasan Minto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Sajjad Zahir, Ismat Shahid Latif and Ishrat Rehmani. Ashk's plays are included in his collections *Pipi* and *Charwahe*. Some of them contain bitter attacks on social customs and behaviour. Minto's plays like *Aao*, *Tin Aurten* and *Janaze* are even more biting. Bedi's *Chanakya*, *Naql-i-Makani* and *Rakhshinda* are good psychological hits. Krishna Chandra is known for his compressed suggestive language and lucid expression. His plays *Sarai Ke Bahar*, *Miss Battliwala* and *Darwaza* are especially notable.

The film and the radio retarded the progress of the stage considerably. Its use is now mostly confined to occasions like the Dussera and Janmashtami. A few longer plays, of course, have appeared during this period. But they can be ignored. Recently, however, the utility of the stage has been realised. Educated people of both sexes are being attracted to it. The formation of the Indian People's Theatre Association is an instance. Some prominent writers came under its influence. Thus, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas wrote *Amrit* and *Zubaida* and Ali Sardar Jafri *Yeh kis ka khoon hai*. The main drawback in these and other plays of this type is that the "purpose" in them prevails over all other things, thus distracting from them much of their artistic and entertainment value.

